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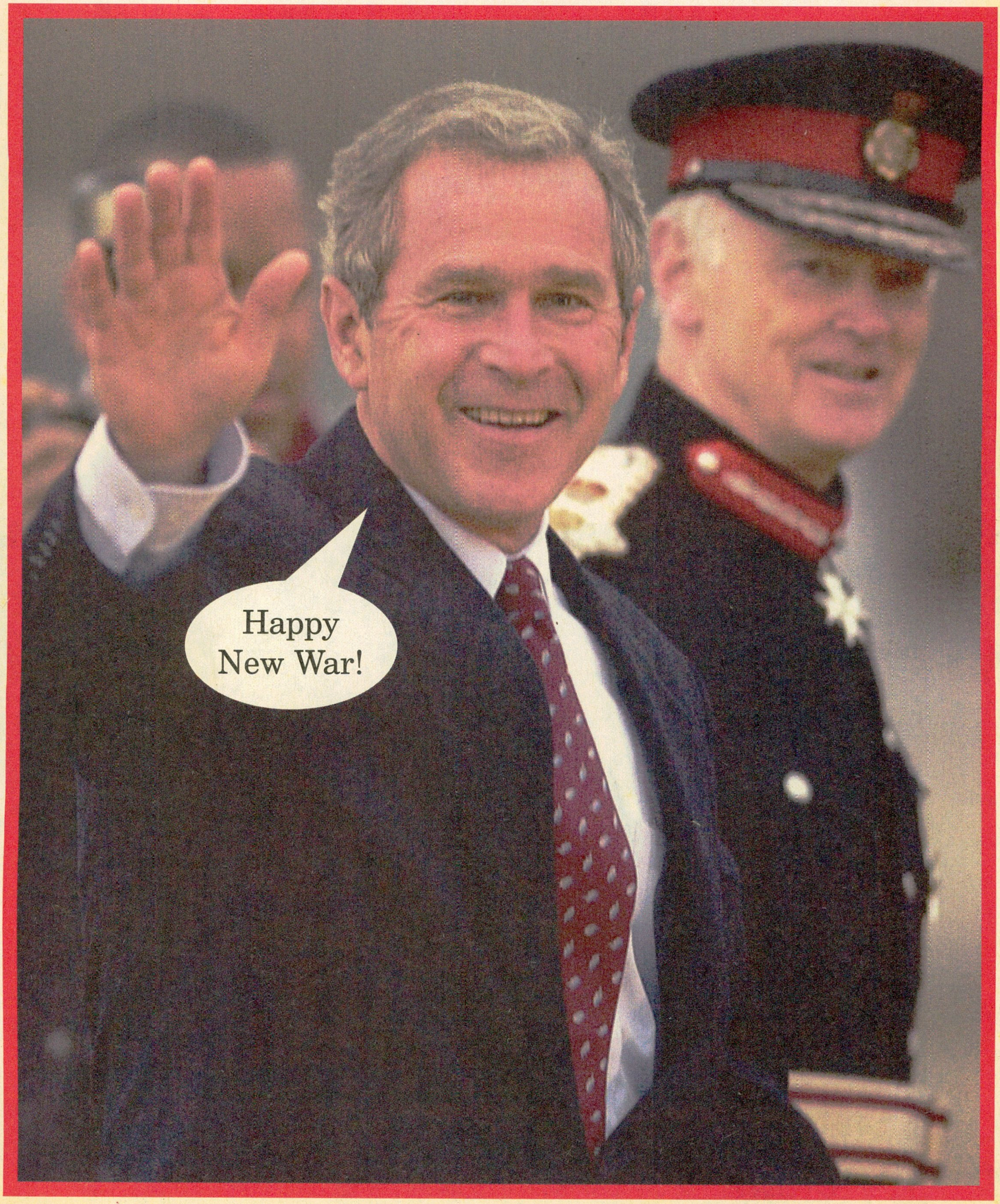

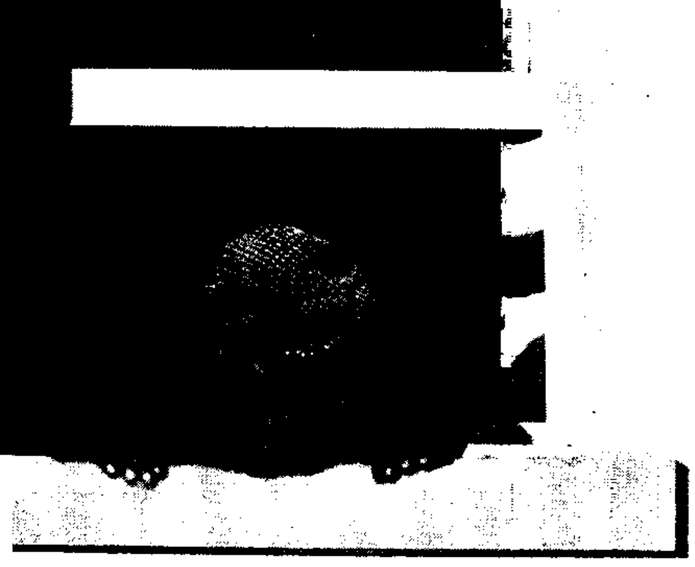

HEÀRLAIG
TE STREET

loads of body, plenty of legs and a lovely mouthfeel

Ardbeg beg to differ

SINGLE ISLAY MALT
SCOTCH WHISKY

Lord Gnome Bores Ceremony Cancelled A STATEMENT

LORD GNOME regrets that, for the first time in living memory, he has had to cancel his annual Bores of the Year Awards ceremony, which was to have been staged this year in the Celebrity Big Brother house, Neasden.

The following reasons were given for this sad decision:

- the possible presence in the audience of members of the paedophile community with camcorders
- the likelihood that the ceremony would be a target for a smallpox attack by Al-Qaeda terrorists
- the unacceptable risk of staging such an event at a time when the fire-fighting community could well be involved in industrial action
- the difficulties which would be faced by guests in trying to reach the venue following the introduction of Mayor Livingstone's popular congestion charges
- according to a legal opinion provided by Matrix Chambers, such an award ceremony would be in clear breach of the Human Rights Act and the European Convention on Human Rights, in that it would constitute unfair discrimination against all those who failed to win an award
- the inappropriate nature of staging such a frivolous occasion at a time when our country faces the imminent possibility of the Third World War against Iraq
- the unanimous conclusion of the judges that all the awards would have had to go to the same bores who won them last year.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Why Christmas is Good For You."
— *Daily Express*, 17 December, Page 27.

"How Your Holiday Can Make You Ill."
— *Daily Express*, 17 December, Page 34.

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ABC

Season's bleatings

- *From Mystic Mogg to the Dirtiest Digger: the Hackwatch Awards 2002* 5
- *Blunt pencils: The year's most nauseating ads* 9
- *Rotten Boroughs and those councils of despair* 11
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IN THE TEAROOM

THE Tories packed up for the Christmas break with the polls showing they're back to square one. It's now 10 years since they were ahead of Labour. And apart from a few glorious days during the petrol crisis, even when the government is up to its knees in ordure, things never seem to look up for the Conservatives.

"Is it our policies or our leader?" they ask. Well it can hardly be their policies, you'd think, as they don't appear to have any. The party's policy supremo, Greg Clark, is given to gnomic utterances such as "the job of opposition is to be more like a lighthouse than a shop-window", which backbenchers find baffling.

As for the leader, what's he doing wrong? He hasn't worn a silly baseball cap. He doesn't speak with a stage-Yorkshire accent. He's been extra careful not to boast about drinking 14 pints of beer. In fact IDS seems to spend most of the time locked in a room with his PPS Owen Patterson and a few other cronies like spin-doctor Nick Wood and "adjutant" Mike Penning. What could they be plotting?

Listeners at the keyhole report that the latest quandary is how to ditch shadow chancellor Michael Howard, or at least cajole him into a humiliating U-turn. Why knife the shadow chancellor? Well, with all other explanations exhausted, the simplest must be true: that no one is even going to contemplate returning to the Tories unless they promise a massive Dubya-style tax cut for the middle-class. Howard's pledge to keep up Labour levels of public spending is now seen as a mistake. There's even talk of getting Oliver Letwin to repeat his "gaffe" at the last election – accidently promising a £20bn public expenditure cut, and then disappearing into rural Dorset while the implications, for good or ill, sink in.

'Urquhart'

MOST observers now accept that the public private partnership (PPP) plans to hand the tube to private companies will be more expensive than running the decrepit system as it is now. So who, apart from Gordon Brown and "new" Labour's privatisation fanatics, is responsible for the financial mess?

Step forward Patrick Butcher, one of the main architects of the PPP scheme. An accountant reared in Johannesburg, he was finance director of London Underground while the PPP plans were put together. Butcher resigned from the underground a year ago. And where is he now?

He is finance director at Mapeley, the company responsible for the PFI deal in which £370m worth of tax and customs buildings were flogged off to a Mapeley subsidiary based in a tax haven. (*See In the Back.*)

THE strategic rail authority's decision to bail out Connex with an extra £58m is a shock to passengers on their miserable south-east train services.

The firm claims it was going bust (to which most commuters would say "about time"). But the decision is in line with government policy, which seems to be to suck up to the miserable outfit.

At the last Labour party conference transport minister John Spellar spoke at a Connex-sponsored meeting alongside Connex chief executive Olivier Brousse on the subject: "Do you feel safe at night?" Spellar is keen on the way Connex deals with crime, but seems relaxed about letting it mug the government.

The firm has also been a "£5,000 or more" donor to Labour in previous years.

PS: Brousse saw his salary leap by 63 percent to £155,000 a year in 2001. This year, when Connex lost a whole rail franchise because of its pisspoor service, Brousse saw only a tiny cut in his "performance bonus" as his salary dropped to £140,000.

WHO really benefits from private finance initiatives was plain to see when a north London school recently marked the opening of its new technology block by Prince Andrew. It sent more than 800 children home to make room for the VIP business guests of construction firm Jarvis.

Jarvis is lead contractor in the PFI consortium which is refurbishing nine secondary schools in Haringey. Its 500 guests included suits from McDonalds, WHSmith and Claridges. Just 200 children were allowed into their classrooms at White Hart Lane School in Wood Green on the day the Duke of Pork turned up to do the honours.

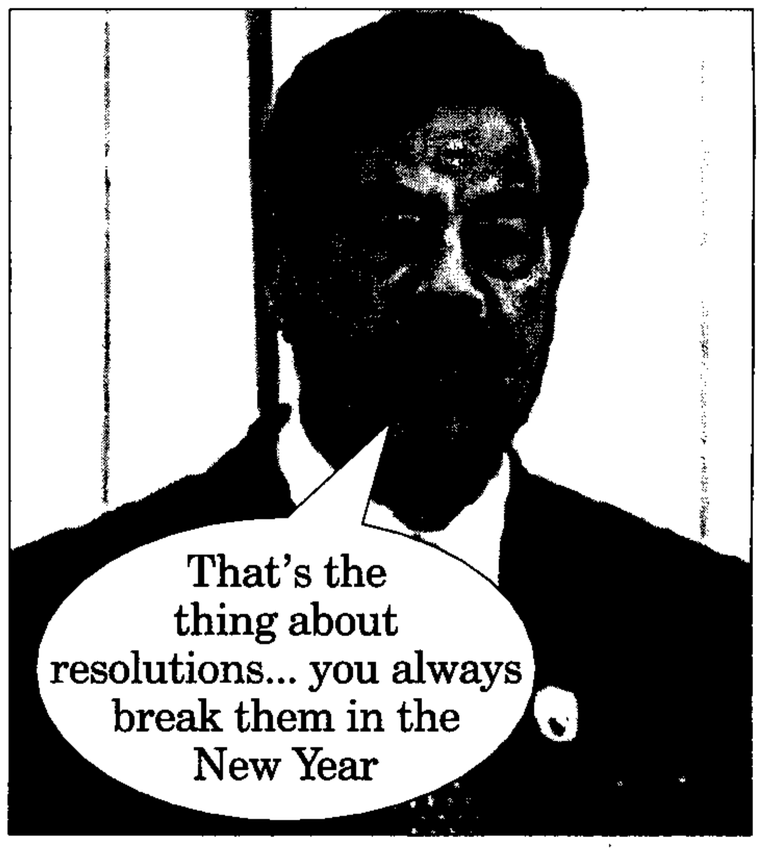
Julie Davies, secretary of the National Union of Teachers in Haringey, said: "When they came to serve lunch even the few remaining kids were sent home. The children on free school meals had to do without while all the Jarvis people and their guests were having a wonderful time stuffing their faces with vol-au-vents from a lavish buffet."

Haringey got a lousy deal on the £95m PFI contract with Jarvis. After being encouraged to sign up to the scheme by the treasury, it found the contract did not cover furniture, IT equipment, cabling or disabled access.

PS: Jarvis's £59m PFI deal with Kirklees council in West Yorkshire is in trouble. It has a contract to repair and run 22 local schools but headteachers have written to the department for education with a catalogue of complaints. The work overran so children missed school days, heads think the work is "shoddy" and exam results are falling. Schools standards minister David Miliband has ordered an inquiry.

PPS: It was Miliband who suggested all future schools maintenance should be done under PFI.

U.N. RESOLUTION SHOCK



Street of Shame

PETER Foster met Cherie Blair once. Sleazy porn baron Richard "Dirty" Desmond, by contrast, has been a regular guest of her husband at Downing Street, and even at Chequers. And he has repaid the favour, not only by bankrolling Blair's last general election campaign but also by slavish support in the *Express* titles.

Alone in Fleet Street, the *Daily Express* scarcely deigned to notice the epic Cheriegate saga. What coverage it had, however, was very friendly – summarised in a brief editorial headed "End Cherie Inquisition Now", which praised Cherie for bravely seeing off her critics and insisted that "the country has far more pressing matters to attend to".

As the great love-in between the porn magnate and the pious PM continues, we trust no one will inform Blair that after the 1997 election – when Dirty Des was still a Tory supporter – he urged the editor of his *Readers' Wives* magazine to run a naked Cherie lookalike on the cover. It would be a pity to spoil a beautiful friendship by dredging up this tasteless stunt.

NO ONE was more sympathetic to Cherie Blair's problems with ball-juggling than Allison Pearson – columnist, TV pundit, novelist and mother. "What Mrs Blair said made perfect sense to any normal reader who has ploughed through three rainforests of speculation this week," she wrote in the London *Evening Standard*. "Like any working mother, Cherie is frantically busy, with no time to spare for the fine print."

Yet despite her own busy schedule, Pearson did find time to spare for the newsprint – and seized the opportunity to promote her new book. Perhaps she got the idea from *Times* hackette Mary-Ann Sieghart, who observed on 6 December that "*I Don't Know How She Does It*, the best-selling novel by Allison Pearson, has a heroine, Kate Reddy, whose circumstances are eerily similar to those of Cherie Booth/Blair…"

On 15 December, in between columns about Cherie for the *Evening Standard*, Pearson managed to write more than 2,500 words for the *Sunday Times*, revealing that "when I was researching *I Don't Know How She Does It*, a novel about a stressed-out working mother, I took Cherie Blair as one of the models for my heroine Kate Reddy." So Cherie helped create Kate Reddy and now here she is "delivering a speech that could have come straight from my novel. Was I surprised? Not altogether… Since *I Don't Know How She Does It* was published here in June it has spread across the world. Finland, Holland, Japan, Italy, Croatia, Germany, America, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil, Portugal , Sweden, Israel, Denmark, Canada [*you've done that one – Ed.*], Korea – wherever the story of the working mother has travelled, women have seized it as their own."

To prove the point, Pearson also turned up in the *New York Times*, defending Cherie Blair and indeed Kate Reddy. "People like her are under tremendous stress," she revealed. Just so: they barely have time to supervise the hiring of a nanny before it's time to write another column and/or novel about the stress of it all.

FULL marks to the *Daily Star*'s showbiz columnists, the "Bitches," whose regular "Spotted" column on 12 December scored a real scoop:

"SPOTTED REGALLY in London… **The Queen** leaving Buckingham Palace in a chauffeur-driven car."

NO *FT*, no comment… And there certainly wasn't much time to comment on the story about Sir Christopher Gent, chief executive of Vodafone, in the *FT*'s prestigious "Need to Know" column on 18 December.

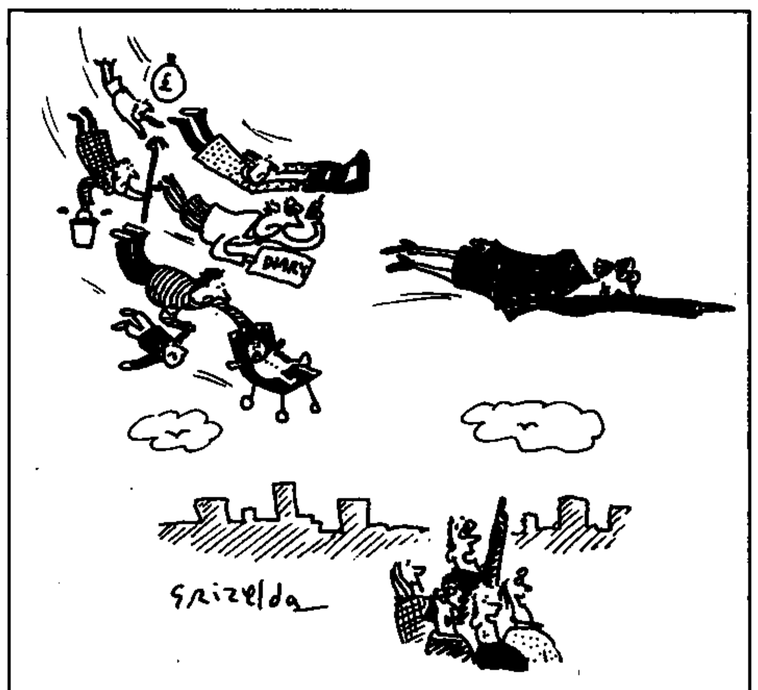
The column assured readers: "While many of his counterparts are losing their jobs, Sir Christopher will celebrate his sixth year at the head of the mobile phone operator." *Whoops!* At two minutes to six on the same morning, before most *FT* readers had had a chance to savour the assurance, the Press Association issued an item of home news: Sir Christopher Gent, 54, was retiring early.

YET more arrests in London last week as part of Operation Ore, the Scotland Yard investigation into suspected paedophiles who subscribed to the "Candyman" kiddy-porn website. The 1,300 people arrested so far include teachers, careworkers and indeed police officers.

Now the *Eye* learns that Inspector Knacker has another suspect in his sights, who has been under surveillance for several weeks. The man in question is an executive employed by Richard "Dirty" Desmond!

Of course there's no suggestion that Dirty Des knew of the man's tastes and habits, but some other colleagues certainly did: the executive has sometimes even asked if they'd like to see one of his child-porn videos. He has also mentioned a friend in Norfolk, known as "Mr T", who can procure 13-year-old girls.

All most embarrassing – especially as it seems these allegations may be mentioned in evidence next February when the epic legal battle between Dirty Des and his former porn chieftain Deric Botham reaches the high court.



"Look! It's Superwoman... and all her assistants"

THE *Daily Mail*'s recent campaign against lottery handouts focused largely on the communities fund, whose chairwoman Lady Brittan received death threats and dog excrement from *Mail* readers as a result.

The paper also found time to take a sideswipe against the new opportunities fund, reserving some bile for a grant of "nearly £5,000" to a project offering support and advice to sex workers in Scotland.

The sum was small beer for the fund which last year shelled out £1m to the private company British Pathé, which wanted to put its news reels dating back to 1896 on the internet. It was justified as deserving lottery cash on the ground that historical documents "would be free to preview free of charge in schools and public libraries". This is true – but if anyone actually wants to use the reels in presentations or see them in any form other than low-resolution web images, it costs between £50 and £100 a shot. And Pathé only guarantees that the preview service will be free for the first three years.

And what has the *Mail* had to say about such questionable use of a huge amount of lottery cash? Er, nothing – possibly because British Pathé is owned by the Daily Mail and General Trust. Last month, a week after the website launched, DMGT was happy to announce its preliminary results, which showed "improved profitability due to a return to profit for British Pathe".

THE NEOPHILIACS

An occasional series about the ceaseless quest for the new new.

"Dirty, if anything, has become the new clean." — Charlotte O'Sullivan, *Independent*.

"Sixty is the new forty." — Lulu in *Sainsbury's* magazine.

"In the vanity stakes, men are the new women." — Channel 4 trail for *Vain Men*.

THE shy and retiring Pamela Anderson and Tommy Lee are celebrating a court decision to uphold their intellectual property rights relating to a video that shows them having lots and lots of sex.

The tape was apparently stolen from their home six years ago. It quickly surfaced on the internet where it has gained a wide and appreciative audience. Anderson and Lee picked up $1,480,000 in damages for invasion of privacy and breach of copyright after suing a Los Angeles-based internet service provider.

This precedent might come as a surprise to Britain's *Sunday Sport* and its proprietor David "The Slug" Sullivan, whose *Sport* website has also offered free downloads of the Anderson-Lee video. No doubt the Slug will think of a way to fend off their lawyers.

A TINY correction was buried on page 16 of the *Independent* on 13 December: "Yesterday's article on India and Pakistan confused the name of the former Indian foreign minister, Jaswan Singh, with his recent replacement, Yashwant Sinha. The photograph accompanying the article was also incorrect. We apologise for the error."

This scarcely does justice to the magnificent cock-up perpetrated by the *Indie*'s foreign editor Leonard Doyle, whom *Eye* readers may recall as a hack whose close relationship with MI6 has sometimes raised eyebrows. Doyle was granted an exclusive interview with Sinha during his brief visit to London on 10 December, and the ensuing piece took up almost half a page. Very newsworthy it was too, as the Indian foreign minister described Pakistan as a rogue state that should be included in the "axis of evil" alongside Iraq, Iran and North Korea.

The story was immediately picked up by the Indian press – who were rather puzzled to see that throughout the article Doyle referred to the minister as "Jaswan Singh" (Sinha's predecessor, now the finance minister). There was also a large photo, obtained from an agency, of Singh rather than Sinha. Doyle has been introduced to the man, spoken to him at length – yet still apparently had no idea who he was.

"Even the most bumbling Indian hack can tell Jack Straw from Robin Cook," the *Hindu* pointed out. But if the bumbling foreign editor of the *Indie* can't tell Indians apart, surely his chums in MI6 could have helped out?

HACKWATCH AWARDS 2002

MYSTIC MOGG AWARD A SPECIALLY engraved crystal ball goes to *Chat* magazine, whose 10 April issue included a "Jubilee Health Special" rating the health of members of the royal family on a scale of one to ten. Wills and Harry scored only 7/10 apiece, and poor old Prince Andrew was rated at a life-threatening 2/10, but the Queen Mother came top with a gloriously sycophantic 10/10. Alas, she was not around to enjoy the triumph, having already pegged out by the time the magazine went on sale.

MOST CONFUSED HACK DESPITE strong entries from the usual suspects – i.e. Piers "Morgan" Moron – the award goes to media hack Frank Bailey, who reported in the *Sunday Express* on 31 March that Piers Moron had cashed in most of his share options in Trinity Mirror, thought to be worth £1m.

The story was embellished with a quote from former City Slicker Anil Bhoyrul. "I've no idea what shares Piers did or didn't have in Trinity Mirror," he told Bailey, "but if he's made a million he deserves it." A curious comment, considering that "Frank Bailey" is in fact the alias of, er, Anil Bhoyrul. Even by the dubious standards of Dirty Des's newspapers, it must be a record for a reporter to use a pseudonym and then quote himself as not knowing whether or not the story he's just written is accurate.

PEDIGREE CHUM AWARD THE GOLDEN bone goes to Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill's talented dog, Napoleon, for his inspired contribution to an editorial conference at *The Business*, which Brillo was conducting via a telephonic squawk-box from his villa in the south of France. Mid-way through the meeting Napoleon decided he'd heard enough – and instead of listening to the editor-in-chief's views on the great issues of the day, hacks in the paper's London office were treated to his anguished yells: "Aaargh! Down, boy! Bad dog, Napoleon! Get your teeth out of my leg!"

MOST SUICIDALLY FEARLESS PUNDIT "TONY BLAIR is infatuated with business. He is in love with tycoons the way teenage girls are in love with boy bands. His love is both undiscriminating and enduring: any businessman, for ever… The highest goal of Mr Blair's government is to do the bidding of the wealthy. So when a businessman comes knocking at the door, New Labour simply ignores the views and interests of everybody else: unions, party members, the voters that elected the government are all outvoted by the voice of a single tycoon. The really corrupt thing about New Labour is that it believes that the only people who matter are the rich and powerful." — Leader-page article by Simon Hinde in the *Daily Express*, 19 February, only a few weeks before it was revealed that Labour had accepted a six-figure donation from Richard "Dirty" Desmond, porn tycoon and proprietor of the *Daily Express*.

MOST CRAVEN EDITOR SEVERAL judges were impressed by Martin Townsend, editor of the *Sunday Express*, whose absurd "Power List 2002" named Richard Desmond as the 16th most powerful person in Britain — and put *Daily Express* editor Chris "Who He?" Williams at number 43, just one place below the Queen. As usual, however, the eventual winner of our coveted trophy is *Daily Telegraph* editor Charles Moore, who on 19 May ran a 650-word news report on the maiden speech of an obscure peer. Proudly emphasising that the new boy had been "speaking without notes", the *Telegraph* revealed that one fellow lord had congratulated the novice on his "depth of knowledge" while another praised his "considerable international experience". Although this historic occasion was overlooked by every other newspaper, the *Torygraph*'s gushing account more than made up for their oversight. As well it might: the peer in question was Lord Black of Crossharbour, Charles Moore's hilariously self-important proprietor.

DIRTIEST DIGGER ACCEPT NO substitutes: even at the age of 94, Rupert is in top form. In May, after News Corp's quarterly results showed a loss of $7.75bn, he graciously agreed to talk to various hacks via an international conference call. "Good morning, friends!" he began cheerily. "I feel this has been another very successful quarter for our company."

Rafael Epstein of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) was understandably puzzled: "What about the fact that you'll go down in history as Australia's biggest corporate loss?" "That's a pure technicality," the Digger snapped, bringing the interview to a close with a rant against "fucking ABC". ABC News duly broadcast the Digger's remarks, though only after informing listeners that "this report contains an expletive from Mr Murdoch". Is this the first time in journalistic history that a business news story has had to be prefaced with a warning that it might be unsuitable for children?

BEST ROYAL COVERAGE AND THE winner is… the *Grauniad*, whose expert royal reporting kept the paper's Corrections and Clarifications column busy throughout the year. In February, it managed to misdate the Queen's "annus horribilis" speech and gave the wrong birthday for the Queen Mother. In March, a feature aptly titled "It's a Right Royal Cock-Up" claimed that Edward VIII abdicated in 1938. Reviewing the Golden Jubilee concert in June, rock critic Adam Sweeting complained: "What a shame Sir Paul [McCartney] didn't throw in a rendition of 'Her Majesty'… Perhaps he didn't want to lose his knighthood." As every other paper correctly reported, Macca had indeed sung "Her Majesty". But the *Grauniad*'s finest effort was a long feature suggesting what should be done when the Queen celebrates "her ruby jubilee". Alas! As the paper confessed a few days later, this "was misplaced, since it happened 10 years ago".

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR "SHE'S YOUNG, she's sharp and she'll say what YOU are thinking. Emma Jones is the bright, fresh new face of the *Sun* and her hard-hitting new column will give voice to a whole new generation." With this fanfare, on 22 May the *Sun* introduced its new 27-year-old columnist Emma Jones – "the shooting star of the media".

Jones amply justified the hype in her very first column by revealing a "chilling fact" which only a fresh young voice could know: that, er, drugs are bad for you, but lots of teenagers try them. "It's a depressing fact of modern life," she disclosed.

The BBC was so impressed it invited her on to *Question Time* a few weeks later, alongside Teresa Gorman, Menzies Campbell and Chris Mullin. Asked about spin-doctoring, she observed that "Labour hope to concentrate more on policy than they do on substance"; when the subject turned to American intelligence agencies, it turned out she thought the CIA was the CID. The BBC was inundated with horrified emails: "Excruciating… I cringed… Inane ramblings… I can't believe that someone apparently so ill-informed could be asked to give her incoherent views." In short, a worthy successor to Garry Bushell.

LUNCHTIME O'BOOZE AWARD THE UNDISPUTED winners are those *Observer* staff, led by editor Roger Alton, who spent two days at a country house hotel in July pondering the question: where do we go from here? The assembled hacks quickly came up with the answer: straight to the bar. After many comradely exchanges – "you're fucking pissed, you wanker!" – news editor Andy Malone punched business editor Frank Kane, who fell on to a fire grate and fractured several ribs. Malone himself then keeled over, dead drunk, injuring his leg.

A "team-building" football match the next morning degenerated into a riot of wild tackling and mud-wrestling, and left acting review editor Tim Adams with a broken nose. "Fuck fuck fuck," Alton muttered despairingly on returning to the office. "What the fuck's happening to this paper?"

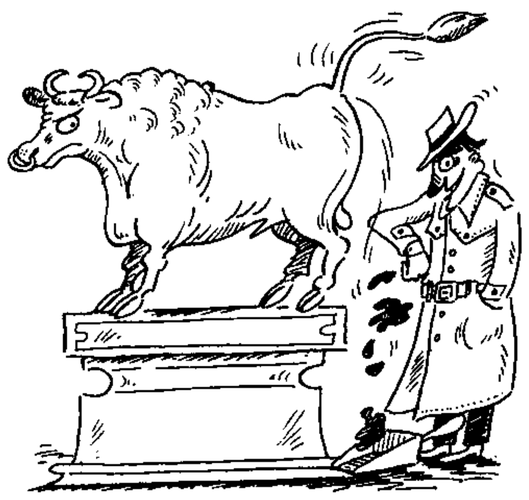
To prove it was no fluke, the Farringdon Road Fighters staged a repeat performance in September when they descended on Edinburgh for the funeral of former *Observer* man Arnold Kemp. Sub-editor Mark Seacombe came to blows with another hack before passing out in a gutter; foghorn-voiced foreign correspondent John Sweeney narrowly escaped a beating from indignant mourners; and, after an epic wake, when columnist Nick Cohen departed for London he discovered that he was wearing his colleague Burhan Wazir's trousers.

MOST DISHONEST DAILY MAIL HACK A CROWDED field, of course, but New York correspondent Daniel Jeffreys gets the gong for his exclusive eye-witness account of the death of British-born Tracy Housel, executed by lethal injection in a Georgia prison.

Billed as "the only British reporter at the execution", Jeffreys revealed that "I watched through a glass screen in the neighbouring room. What happened will haunt my dreams and reshape them into nightmares for years."

In fact Jeffreys had seen nothing at all: he was standing outside in the car park with the rest of the press corps, relying on the accounts of witnesses as they emerged. After a mere four months of dithering, *Mail* editor Paul Dacre decided to reshape Jeffreys's dream into a nightmare – by firing him.

SCOOP OF THE YEAR



TO REWARD Piers Moron's new determination to shun dud stories about celebs, the prize goes to the *Daily Mirror* for its revelation on 24 August: "A new baby is on the way in the Posh and Becks house, a girl, and she will be called Paris." One week later Posh duly gave birth to, er, a boy called Romeo.

CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown's pre-budget report pledged to "stop VAT avoidance" and "root out abuse of the VAT regime." Perhaps he should start by examining his own party's VAT affairs.

Details have emerged of "new" Labour's cunning ruse to save a fortune in value added tax on the purchase of its new HQ in Old Queen Street. As a political party it would have been liable to pay 17.5 percent VAT on the £5.5m purchase of the office buildings in March. Instead it set up a company, Labour Party Properties (Two), that bought the 141-year lease on the building from Collodian Investments Ltd. LPP2 rents the offices to the party and so the company can claim back VAT, just like any other company.

The party's assistant general-secretary Eddie Morgan insisted there was nothing "illegal, inappropriate or unusual" about the deal. Tax avoidance is indeed legal and increasingly "usual" – but perhaps not "appropriate" for a party supposedly clamping down on the practice. Brown's pre-budget report revealed that VAT avoidance costs the treasury around £3bn a year.

The party will have to pay VAT on the 12-year sub-lease it purchased from English Partnerships, which used to rent the building from Collodian, but that will be a considerably lower figure.

Said Morgan: "Our accountants and tax advisers advised us that this was a completely appropriate and standard way of acquiring both leasehold interests." Presumably that's what they're paid for: to find and exploit legal loopholes to ensure minimum tax is paid.

PS: The party called in emergency cash from the unions earlier this year after revealing it was nearly £10m in the red. It moved out of its former HQ in Millbank Tower to save on the cost of renting office space.

MINISTERS have come up with an effective way to deal with tricky parliamentary questions: either ignore them or give a completely useless answer and hope the issue goes away.

Take the efforts of MPs Simon Hughes and John MacDonnell to find out how much money has been squandered on probation privatisation projects: 20 questions tabled, a handful responded to, few with any real answers because of "commercial confidentiality".

Napo, the probation officers' union, is concerned that services are being cut back because of the escalating costs of privatisation in computer servicing (with call-out charges of £2,661 per office after 6pm), management and running of bail hostels and offices (an estimated extra £25-£30m a year) and useless IT systems.

Here is one typically helpful reply from junior home office minister Hilary Benn in relation to computer servicing costs: "Payments made to the company... are covered by commercial confidentiality clauses that are normal under such contracts." Hughes is so exasperated he has tabled a question asking when he is going to get an answer to no fewer than 11 previous questions.

THE CV of Renaissance man Garry Bushell – ex-Trotskyist, punk singer, novelist, red-top ranter and self-styled stand-up comedian – must now include "politician" as well. The UK Independence Party has chosen him as its candidate for mayor of London.

As *Eye* readers will know, UKIP leaders always become most indignant when we draw attention to the links between some of their members and the British National Party. Readers will also recall Bushell's many vehement denials of any overlap between his views and those of the neo-Nazis. So one can only imagine the embarrassment of Garry and his UKIP chums on learning that the first congratulations on his selection came from... the BNP.

"The declining number of White folk living in the capital will... see Mr Bushell's patriotic platform as a means of salvation from the multi-cultural mess our once great capital city has descended into," it informed members. "Although the BNP has plans to contest the mayoral election in 2004 there is now a suggestion which the BNP leadership is seriously considering: namely to stand down and allow UKIP and Mr Bushell a clear field to contest the election. We may then encourage our own supporters to vote for Mr Bushell when the time comes... White Londoners need a strong voice and although we would of course prefer to have Mr Bushell contest the election under a BNP banner it makes sense to consider any suggestion which would benefit White Londoners."

No doubt Garry and UKIP will be quick to disown this generous tribute.

"We'll have to build more superhighways..."

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

WHAT news of the European arrest warrant which will legalise the arrest and extradition of British citizens by EU police – or an "appropriate person" – to countries whose legal systems presume them guilty until proven innocent?

Though the warrant, which is due to become law in 2004, is on its second reading in the UK parliament, the Commons documentation department still has no knowledge of it.

Under the warrant, if the "appropriate person" should cause the wrong person to be stuck in a foreign EU jail for months without trial, he or she will be immune from investigation.

The warrant is part of the infamous Corpus Juris project, a new EU-wide criminal code, and has already been rejected by the House of Lords and criticised by the Law Societies of both England and Scotland. Nevertheless it was adopted by the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on 13 June.

Even lawyers have found it difficult to obtain information about the proposals. When an eminent QC approached the European commission office in London's Storey's Gate, he was told it had no information. It referred him to the documentation centre which had never heard of it either and referred him back to the commission.

The warrant lists 32 offences, including xenophobia and racism, for which UK residents could be carted off to foreign jails to spend several months without evidence being given against them. If that's justice...

CALL TO ARMS

AFTER 18 months of agitating by *Private Eye*, the ministry of defence has finally revealed the dictatorships and countries with poor human rights records to whom it likes to prioritise arms sales.

The MoD released the list under pressure from the parliamentary ombudsman, whose help was sought by the *Eye*. The ombudsman concluded: "The MoD's handling of this request was most unsatisfactory and I criticise them for these failings."

In recent years the government's official weapons trade policy has positively encouraged arms sales to dictatorships in Brunei, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates; as well as to human rights grey areas like Malaysia, Singapore, Turkey and South Korea. These are all "priority markets" for the government's arms marketing department, the Defence Export Sales Organisation (DESO), which is part of the MoD but whose 600 staff specialise in supplying foreign armies and promoting the UK arms trade.

When *Private Eye* originally asked for the list, the MoD said the information was "commercial-in-confidence". Following an appeal under John Major's freedom of information code, the MoD then accepted the list could not be commercially confidential as it was freely distributed to arms manufacturers based in the UK, including those that are foreign-owned. But the information still couldn't be released, it said, as it was now "information whose disclosure could harm the conduct of international relations and affairs".

As it took the MoD a whole year to come up with this excuse, the *Eye* asked the ombudsman for help. After that intervention, the MoD at last admitted there had been "a number of lapses" in dealing with our request and that there had been "a failure to be explicit" which the spokesman "very much regretted".

Nonetheless, with the advice of the foreign office, the MoD still wanted to keep the list secret. It was worried that any country buying arms from Britain which found it wasn't a "priority" might stomp off in a huff. The ombudsman thought this was codswallop and said so: "I find it difficult to envisage that any harm might now arise from the disclosure."

The list dates from 2000 and was operational under former foreign secretary Robin Cook, architect of Labour's laughable "ethical" foreign policy. A new list, which remains confidential, was drawn up last year. But the markets remain fairly stable. The *Eye* has seen the previous "priority markets" list which ran from 1998 to 2000. The countries were identical, except Indonesia and Pakistan were "priority markets" in 1998 but not in 2000. Pakistan's military rival, India, remained on the list, as did Australia, Brazil, Finland, Greece, Norway, Sweden and the US.

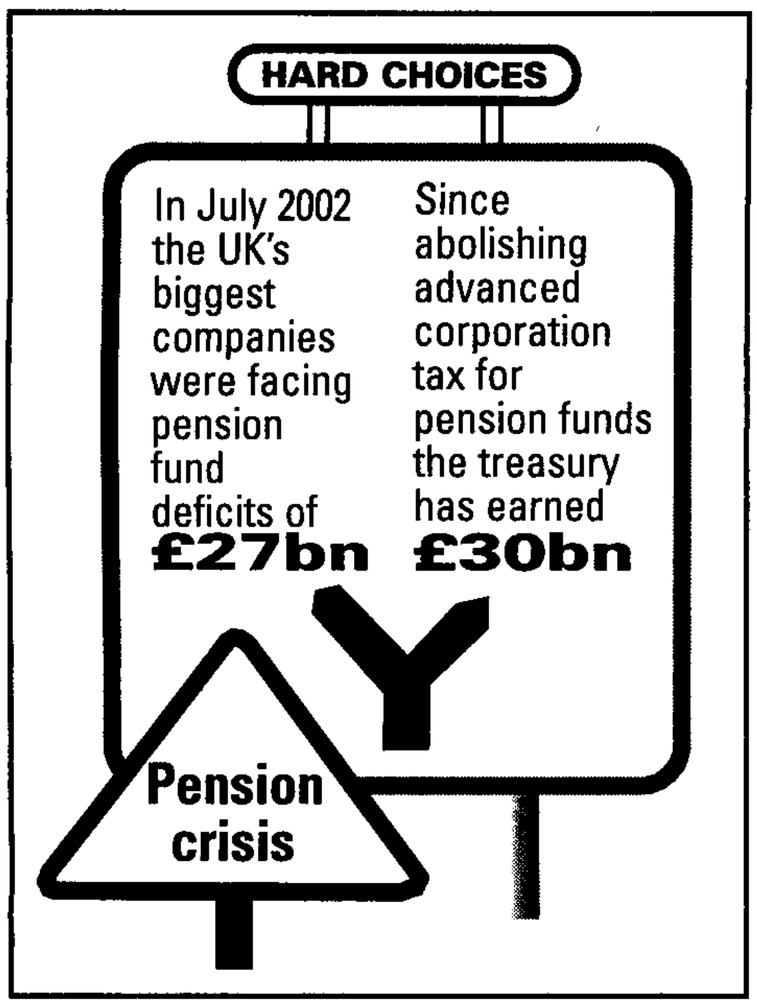
Number crunching

3 pictures of Ken Livingstone in first issue of *The Londoner* newsletter, distributed to all constituents

16 appearances of the name "Ken Livingstone" in its 12 pages

7 pictures of Boris Johnson in first issue of *Boris Johnson's Westminster Report*, distributed to all constituents

20 appearances of the name "Boris Johnson" in its 4 pages


HARD CHOICES
In July 2002 the UK's biggest companies were facing pension fund deficits of £27bn
Since abolishing advanced corporation tax for pension funds the treasury has earned £30bn
Pension crisis

DATA PROTECTION FACT

A FORMER nurse is asking the courts to alter her medical records to remove offensive comments and suggestions that she is suffering from an obsolete Victorian condition describing hysterical women.

Jessica Lawrence is the first person to try to use the 1998 data protection act (DPA) to demand a change to her notes – which it took her two years to access, using the same legislation. She will appear in court in Watford in January to ask a judge to strike out several details added to her NHS records by the National Hospital of Neurology and Neurosurgery and a number of specialists she was referred to by the hospital.

Since 1993 Miss Lawrence has suffered from a baffling range of symptoms including temporary loss of coordination in her left side, pains in her legs and disorientation. Doctors believe the condition could be psychological.

The DPA allows any individual to have errors removed from records and to have data which is "substantially damaging and distressing" removed from records. It also allows the individual to apply to a court to have these changes made if the data controller — in this case the hospital — refuses to make the changes.

Miss Lawrence's notes include references to her as "a girl" (she was 39 at the time) and "trouble". She alleges there were clerical errors over test results; and there is also a letter in the notes from a specialist who in 1995 concluded that he suspected she was suffering from Briquet's multiple symptom condition. Briquet's was defined in Paul Briquet's *A Treatise on Hysteria* in 1859. The condition was removed from the psychiatrists' bible, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* in 1980. "No investigations need to be done," concluded the doctor's notes, leaving Miss Lawrence struggling to get further tests.

"I'm just asking the judge to put a line through these things and to strike out the diagnosis of this ridiculous condition," she says.

The University College London Hospitals Trust, which runs the National Hospital, is opposing the request for a court order. It says it wants to "ensure that the medical notes continue to be a proper record of the previous consultations including those expressed medical opinions."

PRIVATISATION, PRIVATISATION, PRIVATISATION,

MORE on the pisspoor privatisation of the Criminal Records Bureau by our old friend, Capita.

Bills for two enhanced checks by the CRB dropped through the letterbox of a youth offender workers' recruitment agency this month. The two £12 invoices were a surprise since the small agency, Backstop, has not yet received a single result on any of the checks it has applied for, including several submitted back in March.

The CRB is run by Crapita under a £400m contract. The firm was fined following this summer's teacher vetting fiasco which forced the government to suspend checks to allow the school term to start.

Backstop's MD Andrew Thorne estimates that at least 10 people, desperately needed by understaffed youth offending team (YOT) services, have not been able to take up jobs because their CRB results have not arrived. When Crapita took on the contract it agreed to process the enhanced checks within three weeks of a request.

COMPLAINTS continue to pour in about the privisatised cooking, cleaning and maintenance services provided by Anglian Water's Morrison Construction in Britain's bail hostels.

One hostel in Newcastle-upon-Tyne had to live with blocked toilets until a plumber could be sent from the other side of the country… in Chester.

Nevertheless the government seems undeterred by the spiralling costs and criticism and has dished out three more lucrative contracts – this time for the management of buildings and other facilities. The contract winner in the East division – a third of the country – is none other than Morrison.

"...or, alternatively, you become a Buddhist, and totally renounce all wealth and possessions"

TUC NEWS

MEMBERS of Amicus want to know exactly where their union stands when it comes to relations with "new" Labour.

On the one hand Derek Simpson, general-secretary of AEEU-Amicus, recently echoed the words of firemen's leader Andy Gilchrist in wishing to take "the [Labour] party back to what it used to be". Meanwhile a leaked letter reveals that MSF-Amicus, under the leadership of Roger "Currant Bun" Lyons, gave the party "gifts in kind" which breached both union rules and electoral law.

The union's financial report presented to its annual conference revealed that three of the union's offices – two in London, one in Caerphilly – had been "donated" to the Labour party for three weeks during the 2001 general election. The "rental" of all three, plus the cost of telephone calls, postage and photo-copying, were valued at the remarkably low figure of £875, paid out of the union's general fund. That was unlawful: the relevant act stipulates that such payments should come from a union's political fund, as does MSF-Amicus's own rule book.

When a member queried the report Paul Talbot, the union's assistant general-secretary, took six months to respond. He wrote that the £875 "has since been transferred from the political fund to the general fund" and said that although telephone canvassing had taken place, no record of calls made or postage paid had been kept. For its part Labour clearly broke electoral law by accepting "gifts-in-kind", which to be legal must be itemised and honestly priced.

'Blackleg'

DOWN ON THE FARM

EXAMPLES of official ineptitude and vindictiveness were legion during last year's foot and mouth crisis. But as a recent court case in south Wales showed, the spirit of vindictiveness lives on.

The Raglan abattoir run by the James family, father William, his wife Ethel and their son Ray, is the only slaughterhouse left in Monmouthshire. All others in the area were forced out of business in the 1990s by the explosion of regulatory costs when the Maffia enforced the EU's notorious meat directive 91/497. Even the James's abattoir only survived when, to avoid having to pay £63 an hour for a ministry vet to sit around all day doing nothing, they opted for a low-throughput licence, reducing the number of "livestock units" they were permitted to kill to just 20 a week.

But then came foot and mouth, and suddenly the Maffia was desperately in need of all those abattoirs it had closed down, to alleviate the fast-growing welfare crisis. Farmers were crying out for help with all those animals stuck on farms from which, under movement restrictions, they could no longer be moved except to a slaughterhouse.

This was where the James family became the heroes of the hour. They did everything they could to help farmers for miles around, spending thousands of pounds on all the equipment necessary to comply with biosecurity rules. The local Maffia officials said that, in light of the crisis, they would be grateful if the abattoir would exceed its 20 units a week limit. The official vet employed by the Meat Hygiene Service, part of Sir John Krebs's Food Standards Agency, said there would be no problem. His meat inspectors stamped the meat as fit to eat. Everyone, including those highly relieved local farmers, seemed happy.

All this until the crisis was over, when the Meat Hygiene Service suddenly changed its tune – and 74-year old William James found himself facing a string of criminal charges for exceeding the limits set by his licence: the very limits the Maffia had asked him to ignore. In one week the abattoir had actually slaughtered 34 animals.

Earlier this month William James for the first time in his life found himself in Newport magistrates' court, faced with charges under the "hygiene rules", which sounded as ominous as you could get, and liable to fines running into tens of thousand of pounds, even imprisonment.

Mr James admitted he was technically guilty of the four charges that now remained. But when he explained the circumstances he was given a conditional discharge, and ordered to pay only £250 of the £2,268 costs demanded by Ian Thomas, the barrister for the Food Standards Agency. Mr Thomas sententiously observed that the laws Mr James had broken were only there to ensure that hygiene standards were not endangered.

Next day the verdict made the main front page story in South Wales's daily newspaper, the *Western Mail*, under the headline "Stab in the back for farmers' hero", complete with an editorial excoriating the Food Standards Agency for criminalising a man who had only been acting in response to pleas from another government department. What the *Western Mail* did not reveal was that the agency only acted as it did because, if it had not prosecuted Mr James, it would itself have faced legal proceedings from the EU's Food and Veterinary Office for allowing a breach of EU law. But, as a fervently Europhile paper, the *Western Mail* might not have been happy for its readers to know who were the real villains of the story.

'Muckspreader'

ETV

Holby City (BBC1)
Merseybeat (BBC1)
The Bill (ITV)

"PRECINCT" drama – that's the future. Inexpensive, endlessly renewable and unaccountably popular, these series are designed to free up the rest of the schedule for more prestigious productions, such as *Garden Force* and *Celebrity Bargain Hunt Live*.

Critics don't pay them much attention, but they are not supposed to. The idea is that these series just roll on indefinitely, the televisual equivalent of a perpetual motion machine. It doesn't matter where they are supposed to be going, because they are never going to get there. Hamsters in a wheel and everyone associated with **Holby City** must have much in common.

Hospitals, though, are traditionally where BBC drama feels most comfortable. Despite a long and dismal decline into somnolence, *Casualty* remains the flagship. Millions tune in every week to find out which guest star will be crushed by a falling anvil and which will refuse to have a blood transfusion because he's a Jehovah's Witness. *Holby City* initially injected a little life into the old formula. Decent plotlines, good actors, lively writing – they all proved unsustainable when BBC suits demanded that the 13-part series be extended first to 26 parts and then, without a molecule of shame, to 52 parts. If they could they'd probably bung it up to 104, and even 208 isn't entirely out of the question.

What they don't seem to have noticed, though, is the catastrophic effect all this has had on the actual programme. Since production was stepped up, attention to the basics appears to have been abandoned. Scripts sound like first drafts, and barely that in some cases. Rehearsal is clearly a thing of the past; second takes must be almost unknown. Most of the original cast have fled in horror. Their replacements struggle with many of the same storylines seen in previous series of *Holby City*.

Denis Lawson is the current Lead Surgeon, his hair so bouffant you keep expecting him to float up to the ceiling. Like all Lead Surgeons he never smiles and is never wrong. "Tom's the best in his field," someone said last week. They always are. Hugh Quarshie is The Other Surgeon – it's his job to look concerned. Patricia Potter is Dr Babe. Will she wear her long flowing hair up or down today? Patients all give a potted history of their lives, personalities and medical disorders in a single sentence, and no one ever sees anyone from the outside world. Like all lazy soaps, *Holby* has become hermetically sealed. "I may be old and feeble but I still got me wits about me," says one old bag. Regular viewers may not be so lucky.

Merseybeat was clearly meant for the same fate: indeed, may have been created with that in mind. But at the BBC it has drifted out of favour. It's around now in its brief life that the great expansion to 208 episodes should take place; the word is, however, that it will be cancelled in the new year. Which is a shame, as after a wooden first season, the show has come into its own, as a broadly realistic police procedural with domestic rather than sensationalist tendencies.

Scripts vary, and Haydn Gwynne has suffered unspeakable torments as Detective Superintendent Susan Blake, as well as the most annoying husband in current TV drama; but she is a strong lead with an increasingly confident supporting cast. What it needs, of course, is to be left alone to develop and flourish – at 13 episodes a year. What it needs is the last thing it will get.

Compare to **The Bill**, which has gone mad. When the station isn't burning down, serial killers are roaming unchecked, and zombies can't be far behind. All the ugly old coppers have been replaced by nubiles of both sexes, who are constantly shagging each other in cupboards. Normal crimes are no longer committed, but Ernst Stavro Blofeld is rumoured to have moved into the area. Churning out 104 hours a year – or whatever the current figure is – has warped the show beyond recognition. As any fool who didn't work in television could have predicted...

'Couch Potato'

"Hurry up, love, the Queen's Speech is coming on"

Plugged In

"TELLY cartoon favourite Marge Simpson is to get breasts as big as Sam Fox – after a boob by a plastic surgeon..."

So started a "news" story in the *Sun* on 13 November, expanding this great revelation in detail. The reason for such drivel wasn't explained until the last paragraph. "A new series of *The Simpsons* starts on Sky One this Sunday."

On 14 November, the rag also managed a fine plug for its proprietor's TV station. "Up until 9.07pm on Thursday night Peter Foster had no idea he was being taped. At that moment his mum Louise saw Sky's Adam Boulton breaking the Foster tape story on TV. 'Have you seen Sky? Have you seen Sky? Have you seen Sky?' she yelled down the phone."

In the *Sunday Times*, meanwhile, the following gem recently appeared in a piece on, of all things, pensions. "The third buy was Arena Leisure, which owns horse-racing courses. It also runs Attheraces, which shows the majority of horse racing in the UK on Sky Digital channel 418. I bought 30,000 shares..."

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which German city is also the name of a type of perfume?

Contestant (*after much thought*): Berlin.

AR: In nature, cumulus and cirrus are types of what?

Contestant: Lion.

AR: Pakistan was part of which other state until it achieved independence in 1947?

Contestant: Bulgaria.

AR: In which item of common household plumbing is it possible to immerse the entire human body?

Contestant: The u-bend.

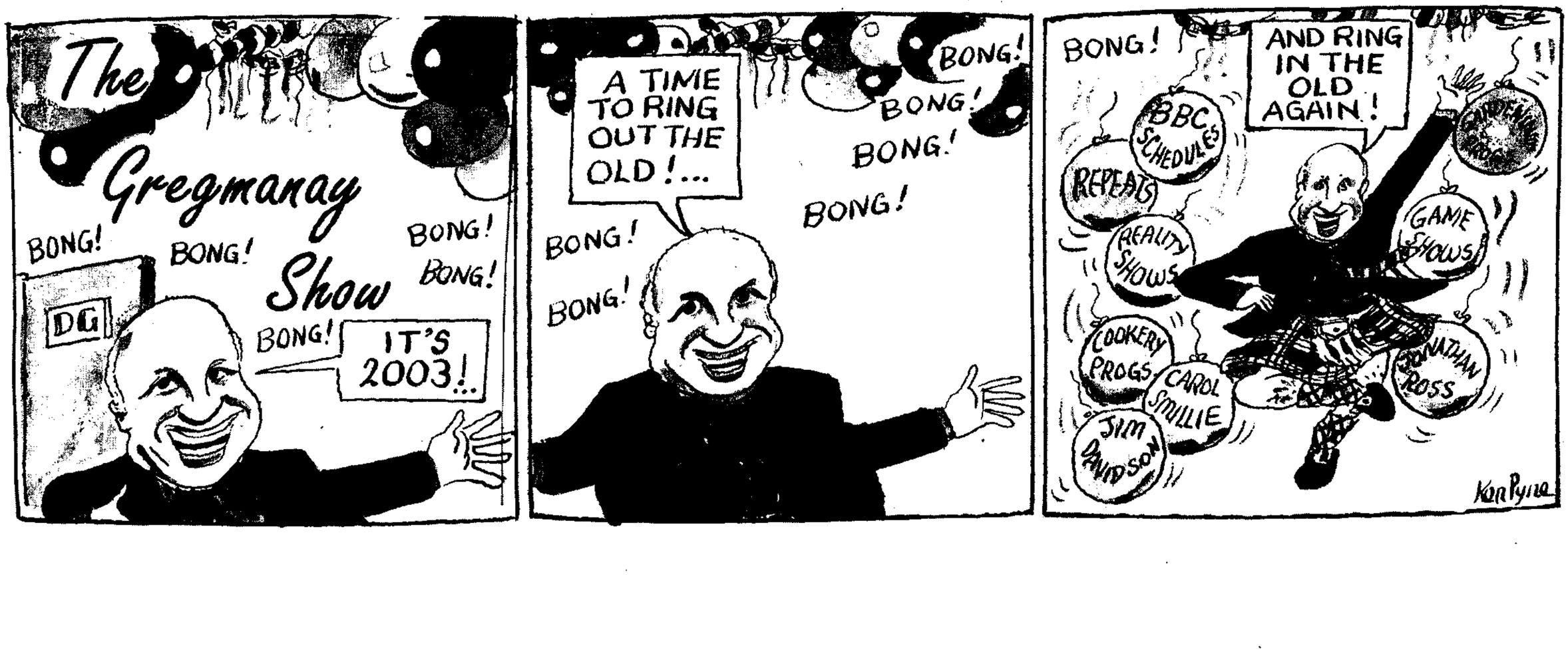
AR: According to a poll in *Total Guitar* magazine, the greatest guitarist of all time was Jimi... who?

Contestant: Savile.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"What kind of a guy does this, because you don't see them coming."

— Richard Madeley interviewing a clinical psychologist in an item on date rape on the *Richard and Judy Show*, 13 December.



MEDIA NEWS

HACKS at ITV News – as ITN is now obliged to call itself, in homage to its paymasters – are reeling from the creative talents of their new boss David Mannion, the successor to Nigel "brother of Paul" Dacre who departed abruptly earlier this year.

At first Mannion – formerly of GMTV and *Tonight* – seemed like a breath of fresh air. He and his right-hand woman Deborah Turness, who jumped ship from Channel 4's *RI:SE* debacle, announced that they were open to new ideas. But the true nature of these "new ideas" has now become horribly apparent.

Hacks have been ordered to include a "gimmick" in every report to pull in the viewers: speeded-up sequences, reconstructions featuring dodgy actors, celebrity interviewees (often from *Coronation Street*) touting their opinions, and pointlessly complex graphics that take so long to put together they're barely ready for transmission. The message appears to be: "Never mind the facts, give me special effects." Hapless hacks who would rather tell the story straight are dismissed as "unproductive".

At the same time, the resources needed to run the operation are being cut. The planning desk consists of one overworked hack who spends his time desperately trying to second-guess which stories the managers want. The graphics department, inundated with new demands, is struggling to meet its daily deadlines. And from January, the number of picture editors – who put the reports together in time for the bulletins – will be reduced, meaning that reporters will have to start editing from 3pm for a bulletin three and a half hours later. Never mind if the story is still developing: it may not be up to date, but hey, Rita from *Coronation Street* is in it!

And where are all the savings going? To pay for extra managers, of course. Under Mannion, ITV News has acquired another *three* tiers of chiefs and boxwallahs. One of them, due to start next month, is designated head of news resources. No one has a clue what it means. Still, no doubt former sports correspondent Graham Miller – who was sent packing by the new regime a few weeks ago along with his producer, during a cost-cutting frenzy – will be glad to know that the money thus saved will help to keep another head of paperclips off the dole queue.

"*FAME Academy* Wins!" announced a BBC Strategy "flash report" following news that its feeble pop talent show had jumped from its opening rating of 4.5m to 7.7m for the final.

An orgy of plugging on news and current affairs programmes, tie-ins with the Beeb's children's channels and a series of eagerly leaked tales of lust among contestants made up by desperate press officers obviously played their part. One BBC Online entertainment reporter who will doubtless go far, reported that he used to "squirm in embarrassment" at the show but now he is "a strident supporter of this must-see television".

The reality is less rosy, however. *Lame Academy* was weak when it started and remained embarrassing until the final frame. Indeed, a camera operator even managed to miss the crucial shot of the winner realising that he'd won.

CHRIS SHAW, controller of news and current affairs at Channel 5, was none too impressed by the BBC's interminable agonising over how to give its political coverage more viewer-appeal.

As he told the *Grauniad* last week: "This strange and long-winded review of political coverage was a rather lame afterthought to a more fundamental problem – politics bores the pants off most people."

Bad news for Chris Shaw's wife, if true. She is Martha Kearney, political editor of the BBC's *Newsnight*.

"I don't get you! We come to the beach and you sit in the shade all day!"

MOST NAUSEATING ADS 2002

THE BLUNT PENCIL AWARDS

AND so with the Christmas celebrity campaigns done and dusted, and little else to do until the advertising recession lifts or someone bans junk mail, we turn to the main event: Ad Nauseam's sumptuous Most Nauseating Ads gala. The sick bags are under you seats.

Agency of the year goes to Yellow M. Regrettably it couldn't be here to collect the award because the company went into receivership in April. If you're wondering who Yellow M is, or was, this was the agency of choice for the Conservative party in the last election. It took the poisoned chalice of trying to sell us the Tories… and it contained hemlock.

In the media innovation category, a great big clanging gong goes to the *Times*, which took a fairly recent advertising invention – the so-called break bumpers that flank TV programmes – and turned them into a piece of televisual torture of which the Stasi would be proud. The *Times'* cricket sponsorship was the scourge of the summer, and the sound of Christopher Martin-Jenkins telling us a batsmen holding a computer-generated newspaper had been "caught off the outside page" will haunt cricket fans for generations.

In the newly-created category for ingenuity in sales promotion, it's a last-minute triumph for Bacardi, which, in an imperious piece of marketing humbug, has announced that henceforth it will be encouraging responsible drinking… by selling larger drinks. Bacardi is supplying participating bars with new optics, staff training, and point-of-sale bumf telling customers that they are getting 40 percent more drink for 20 percent more money. And yet the reasoning given for this see-through sales push is that the "upsizing" helps drinkers gauge how much they have drunk. Triple rum and blacks all round for the PR men!

And finally we come to the rusty prix d'or, the lankest laurel, the bluntest blunt pencil for the year's single most nauseating campaign. It was, as ever, keenly fought. The car manufacturers once again surpassed themselves with a succession of cheesy vignettes to enthral the middle market. Mazda's Zoom-Zoom campaign was the highlight of the spring, a strategy so ill-conceived and poorly executed that the only surprise was when Vauxhall trumped it with their cock-eyed "New Rules" work for the new Vectra.

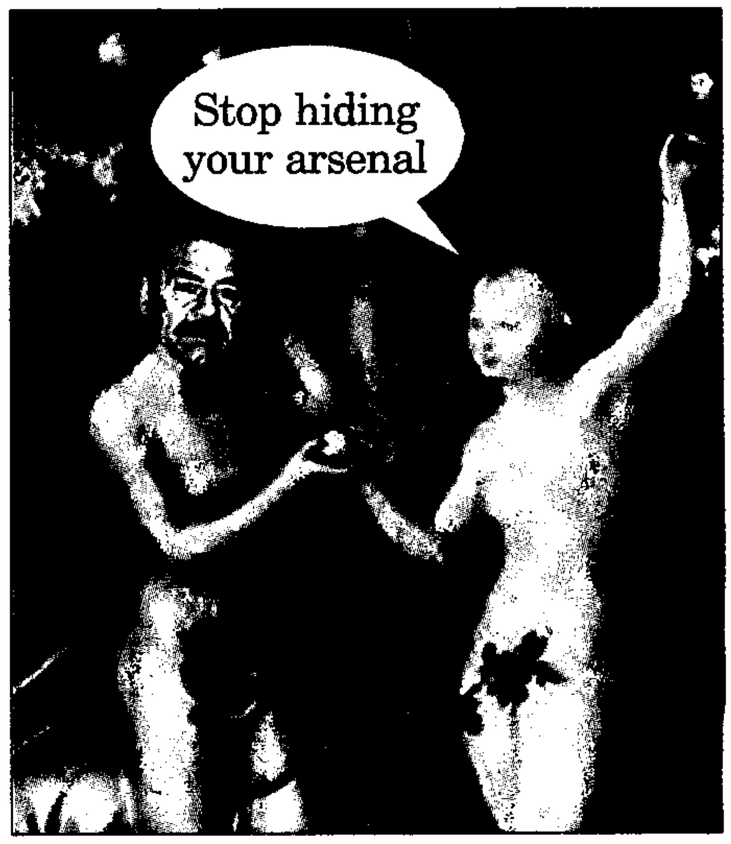
Honorary mentions must go to Tampax for the spot where the badly-dubbed boyfriend mistook a tampon for a boiled sweet, the Zurich Insurance flying pigs and Michael Winner's risible recent spot for esure, starring, directed and written by Michael Winner. It showed.

But for sheer persistence Halifax, and its agency Delaney Lund Knox Warren, take first prize. We have all suffered at the hands of the tone-deaf bank clerks singing bastardised versions of already pisspoor pop songs. But ironically this campaign has just been given a gold award at the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising's own ceremony for being highly effective.

It's effective because it's irritating; the equivalent of poking the public repeatedly with a pin until they finally snap and open a bloody current account. Add to this the much-reported fact that the staff singing "Who Gives You Extra?" weren't paid any extra for their appearances, and you have a proper turkey… and therefore a worthy winner.

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore

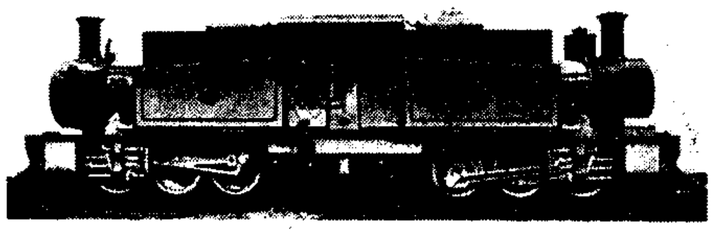


Saddam and Eve

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

GERI HALLIWELL HAS A NEW WORKOUT VIDEO OUT THIS CHRISTMAS:
IT'S THE PERFECT WAY TO LOSE WEIGHT FOR PEOPLE WHO DON'T HAVE MUCH TIME IN THE DAY, AND WOULD RATHER JUST DO IT IN THEIR LIVING ROOM!...
CELEB TOSH
IT SHOWS YOU HOW TO PUT A BUCKET ON THE LOUNGE FLOOR, RATHER THAN HAVE TO KEEP RUNNING TO THE TOILET!
CELEB TOSH



SIGNAL FAILURES

RICHARD BOWKER, head of the strategic rail authority (SRA), wasn't allowed to have anything to do with Virgin and Stagecoach, his former employers, for his first six months in the post because of potential conflict of interest. But he can't possibly be biased now that period is over; and on 8 December he travelled to Perth to speak at the evangelical church of Brian Souter, founder and boss of the Stagecoach empire.

He didn't, however, use his speech on "transport and destinations" to elaborate on why he was so keen to "stabilise" Stagecoach's share price last summer that he rushed through a bail-out for Virgin Rail (half-owned by Stagecoach). That deal relieved Virgin of the duty to pay the public purse about £1.5bn in franchise premiums and gave it £106m extra subsidy for the rest of this financial year for its miserable Cross-country and West coast franchises (see last Eye).

Nor did Bowker explain how he and his pal Jim Steer, now an SRA director, were involved in developing Virgin's disastrous rail plans and are now planning to curtail other companies' services to give Virgin more space.

Perth's Church of the Nazarene, where Souter's family has long worshipped, wasn't the place either for Bowker to justify giving Stagecoach exclusive negotiations for the new Isle of Wight franchise, instead of following his own official policy of reducing costs through competitive tendering. The occasion was more suited to singing along with the church's praise band and choir – rather than to explaining why the SRA suddenly gave £29m last summer to Stagecoach's well subsidised but poorly performing South West Trains, for work SWT would have to do anyway (Eyes passim).

Bowker and Souter would have had plenty of other things to chat about afterwards. Perhaps they reminisced about the days when Bowker worked for Stagecoach as co-chairman of Virgin Rail rather than as chairman and chief executive of the SRA, or swopped notes on Roger Bowker – Richard's dad and one of Souter's most trusted executives.

Asked by the *Eye* about any possible conflict of interest arising from Mr Bowker's visit, a spokesman for the SRA said: "This is a matter of personal faith. Richard is a very religious man. He is not a member of the church of the Nazarene, but he shares with Brian Souter a deep commitment to religion. Mr Souter asked him to speak at his church, and he agreed. There was no conceivable conflict of interest."

Transport disaster

The government's admission it won't cut road congestion is no surprise after the pathetic excuses "new" Labour is using to withhold money from the railways.

"The [rail] industry has got to realise that the government is determined to get value from the money that is going into the system," said transport secretary Alistair Darling, implying that someone else should curb rising costs. But only his government can scrap the Tory-inspired fragmentation which means private companies know they will be bailed out come what may.

Connex is the latest dismal outfit to be let off the hook with a generous donation (£58m) from taxpayers. The ever-growing bureaucracy trying to stop the dysfunctional railway falling apart adds to costs, as does poor rail-safety management.

Darling has dismissed proposed north-south high-speed tracks because people would rather fly and other rail services would suffer if the cash went on a new line, he says. But every other major country in western Europe recognises the benefits of high-speed railways; and 220mph London-Manchester trains would destroy parallel air services (as France's TGV did between Paris and Lyon), reducing demand for bigger airports. Does the transport secretary know this – or that last month the royal commission on environmental pollution advised replacing domestic flights with fast trains, whose emissions are "at least an order of magnitude lower"? A new line would also create much more room for freight and other trains on old lines, so widening of the M6, M1 and other roads ad infinitum could be avoided.

Britain can afford high-speed railways but is too busy giving the road and air lobbies what they want. "New" Labour is even refusing minor rail investments, including those advised in 22 multi-modal studies (on which it spent £30m to mislead the public that it was interested in alternatives to roads) and wants thousands of train services axed under the illusion that this will save money.

Number crunching

£500m

■ initial investment the government hopes to attract through part-privatisation of London Underground

£400m

■ legal, accounting and consultancy fees already spent preparing London Underground for part-privatisation

SRA chief Bowker also seems to be rubbishing rail. "A new railway coach costs around £1m. A new bus is around £125,000," he told a recent conference. "Buses do not have to pay track access charges." He forgot to say that a regional train coach carries nearly twice as many passengers as a bus and lasts three times longer; buses depend on a road system that gets billions in hidden subsidies; and trains are safer than buses and don't add to road congestion. In addition, outside big cities few people are willing to go by bus instead of car.

Bowker's agenda is to starve local railways of investment. He says rail carries 75 percent of commuters from Airedale/Wharfedale to Leeds but only 2 percent of commuters into Nottingham. Instead of concluding that Notts needs rail investment to match that spent on Leeds station and its western commuter routes, he says: "Heavy rail is not the solution to every transport problem." He even uses the superior safety of rail as an argument against it, on cost grounds.

With Bowker as rail-industry "leader", no wonder the road and air lobbies get their way. The SRA isn't interested in cutting pollution, road accidents and traffic congestion: only in balancing its books. Darling could direct funds to the most effective areas in line with overall government policy but, like his Tory predecessors, he's bowing to the vested interests of road and air companies.

'Dr B. Ching'

DOING THE ROUNDS

AS M.D. predicted (*Eye* 1068), "new" Labour is trying to ignore a key recommendation of the Paediatric & Congenital Cardiac Services Review (PCCSR).

The review was set by the government to advise on implementation of the Bristol Royal Infirmary inquiry. It decided that child heart surgery should be limited to fewer centres of excellence, each performing 300 operations a year. This would centralise expertise, improve working conditions and training, and make audit more meaningful. Although it would have involved considerable upheaval for some staff, clinicians were ready to embrace this change.

The government, alas, is "not persuaded", preferring to carry on with the current 13 surgical units. This is politically much safer, saving the embarrassment of halting surgery in some key constituencies; but it risks endorsing the same culture of "occasional practice" that allowed the Bristol scandal to develop. The issue is not so much the number of cases performed in each unit, but the number of consultants and junior staff required to run a legal rota under the new European working time directive.

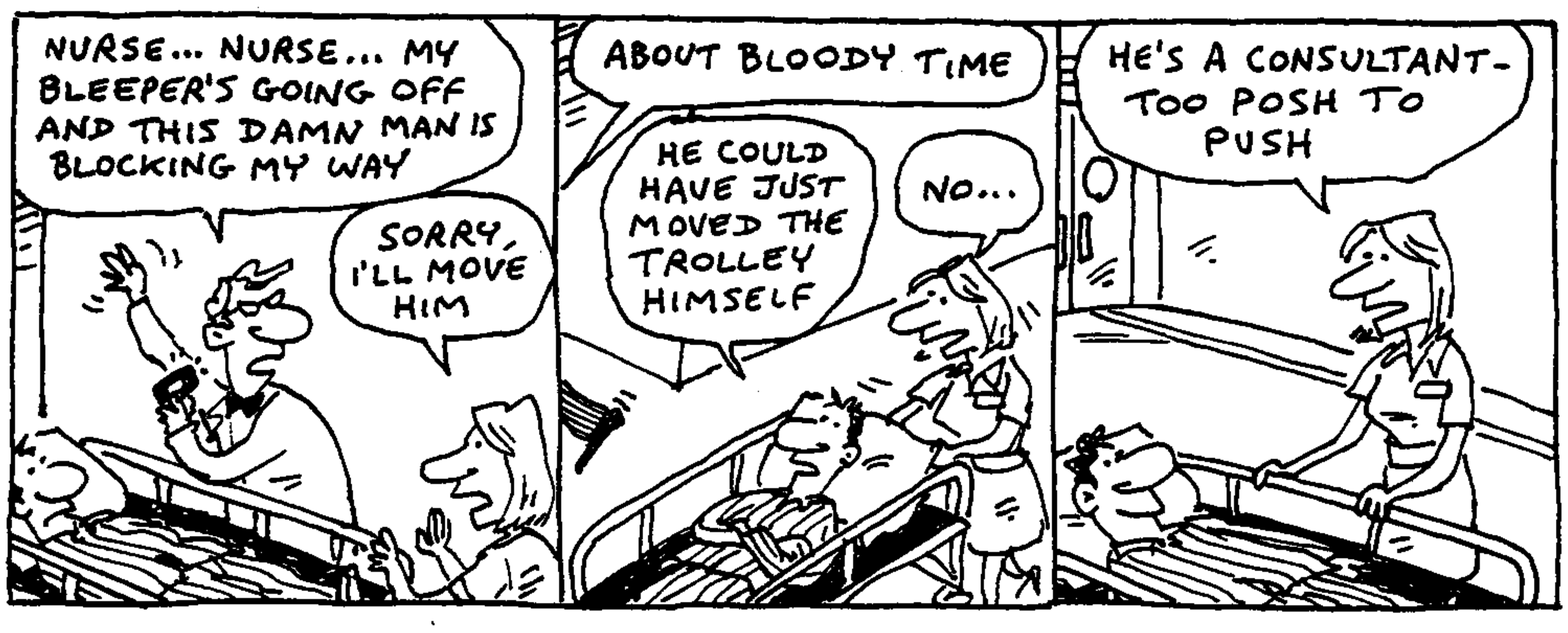
By 1 August 2004, no doctor in training must work more than 58 hours a week, falling to 48 hours a week seven years hence. When these trainees become consultants, they must continue with these safe hours' restrictions and designated rest periods. To run a legal rota, there will need to be at least four consultants in each unit, and ideally five. Most units currently have only two consultant surgeons and there aren't enough in training in the UK to allow such a huge expansion and keep all the units open.

Even if surgeons could be tempted from abroad (extremely unlikely), the costs would be prohibitive and each individual surgeon would end up doing less than one operation a week. Hardly a recipe for developing expertise. The only sensible solution is to reduce the number of centres performing surgery, which would embarrass politicians and make patients travel further for operations, safe in the knowledge that they would be treated by someone who had enough supervised training, rest and experience to guarantee competence.

The working time directive is not a meaningless bit of Euro legislation. There is overwhelming evidence that sleep deprivation and enforced unnatural sleep cycles contribute to thought and movement impairments, injuries and error. And in heart surgery, the margin for error is very slight. But with fewer than 600 days to go before the law is enforceable, Labour is burying its head in the sand over reorganization of its highest profile specialty. God knows what it's planning for the rest of the NHS.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY


NURSE... NURSE... MY BLEEPER'S GOING OFF AND THIS DAMN MAN IS BLOCKING MY WAY
SORRY, I'LL MOVE HIM
ABOUT BLOODY TIME
HE COULD HAVE JUST MOVED THE TROLLEY HIMSELF
NO...
HE'S A CONSULTANT- TOO POSH TO PUSH

Thought for the New Year

A study of new cancer drugs launched in Europe between 1995 and 2000 found that many were not new at all, but "repackaged" old products at prices up to 350 times the original (*British Medical Journal*, Vol 325, pp 269-71).

M.D.

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

IN THE fast-moving world of local government, there's no room for "silo thinking". In this world of radical reform, risk return and reality checking, it is essential to focus on the vision of the shared agenda for change. The watchwords are: Transformation. Modernisation. Partnership. Performance. Best value. Blue-sky thinking. Bullshit.

It is with this in mind we bring you the **Rotten Boroughs Awards 2002**. Local authorities may be broke, schools in crisis, social services near collapse, rubbish uncollected, planning in disrepute and councillors on the take, but golly, they love talking bollocks! So, envelope please, for Rotten Boroughs' **Blue-Sky Thinking Award**.

Despite a very strong field, judges were unanimous in their choice of winner. Step forward **Graham "Club Class" Farrant**, chief executive of **Barking and Dagenham** council. Farrant bores for Britain on "the balanced scorecard as a comprehensive performance management system" – indeed, he spent five days in Boston this summer at the taxpayers' expense so he could deliver one 90-minute lecture on his pet subject. Farrant spent another £40,000 getting 180 council officers to prance about in Arab headgear and pith helmets for a "team building" day. Sadly B&D dropped its plan to convert the post room into an executive "chill-out zone" after we wrote about it.

So popular have the *Eye*'s articles become with staff at B&D they are regularly photocopied and pinned on noticeboards around the civic centre. This has led to an internal email from "head of corporate communications" **Jane Bufton**, reminding staff that "copying and reproducing published material without the owner's consent is illegal... please do not photocopy or reproduce non-council material without written permission from the owner". Well, here it is: Lord Gnome is happy for the staff of B&D to photocopy articles and pin them on noticeboards as often as they like. And a special **Pathetic Email Award** for the lovely Ms Bufton!

THE most closely-fought category is of course that of **Brass-Necked Councillor of the Year** where several characters were in the running.

There was former **Doncaster** Tory councillor **Louise Borrows**, who took a whip to three children she suspected of breaking a window in her house. After receiving a six-month community rehabilitation order and being told to pay compensation to her victims, Borrows declared that she supported government policy on antisocial behaviour and intended to join the Labour party. Highly commended!

Staffordshire Labour councillor **Dennis Heptonstall** and his colleague **Penny Perry** suddenly threw aside their burdens of responsibility as leader and deputy leader of **East Staffordshire council** to take an unannounced extended camper van journey to Uganda. And then returned, just in time, to claim their allowances. And then were put on an important health scrutiny committee. Readers of a local newspaper voted more than 100-1 for the couple to quit, but they're staying put. That's brass-neck class, and it makes them joint runners-up.

Our winner did resign eventually – but it took him nearly a year. Step forward "Grim" **Jim Speechley**, former Tory leader of **Lincolnshire county council**, condemned in an exhaustive external auditors' report for creating a "climate of fear" in the council and misusing thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money in illegal payoffs. Speechley has also been helpful to Inspector Knacker in the course of various inquiries. But still he stayed on, only resigning in September after it became clear that even his spineless Tory colleagues could not support him any more. A worthy winner.

SO MANY to honour, so little space! **Investors of the Year**: the members of **Leeds city council** who put £1.62m of taxpayers' money into Leeds Utd at 18p a share in 1997 and sold in August 2002 at 7.5p.

Payrise of the Year: while local authority employers spat on the claims of council workers and firefighters, the 34.5 per cent awarded to **Darryl Stephenson**, chief exec of **East Riding of Yorkshire** council, bringing his salary up to £140,000, was richly-deserved. It was only exceeded by the amount Eryc later put up council tax: 40 percent.

Press Release of the Year: the misprint in the heading alone wins it for a former **Leicestershire** Tory councillor:

Cunty Councillor Ian Morris

Quote of the Year. Runner-up: "Hartlepool is the only town in Britain represented by two monkeys." – **John Prescott**. Winner: "I have spent 16 years in the company of men who roll their trouser legs up for fun." – former **Brent** Tory councillor **Sean O'Sullivan**.

Arts Event of the Year: Durham city council's 20-minute historical film, *The Sacred Journey*, made by a tennis-playing chum of chief executive **Colin Shearsmith**, played to virtually empty houses all year. Fantastic value for £1m!

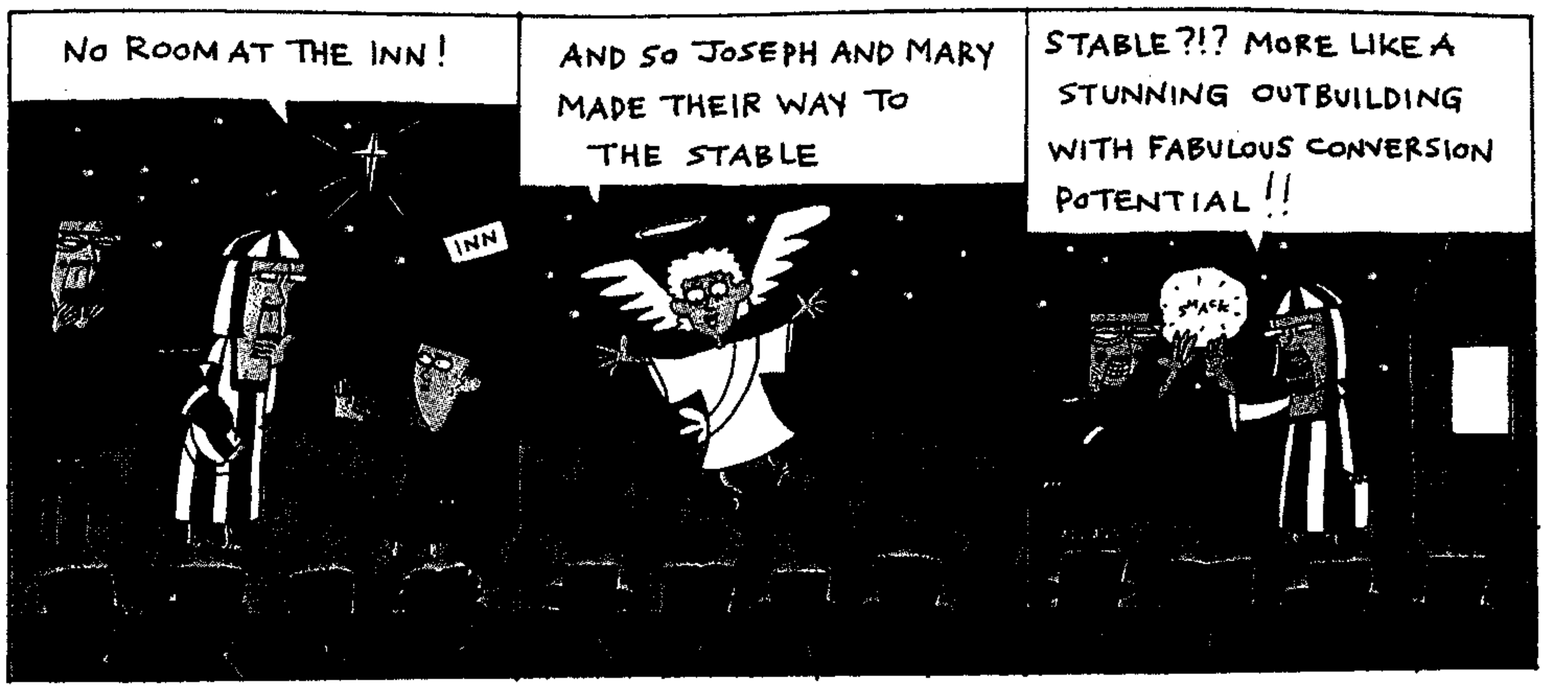
Philistines of the Year: Labour **Brighton and Hove** made its (failed) case for becoming European City of Culture by demolishing a fine former theatre, closing a cinema to make way for a casino and turning its public library into bars. It rounded off the year by closing down its culture department. **Council to Watch in 2003: Flintshire.**

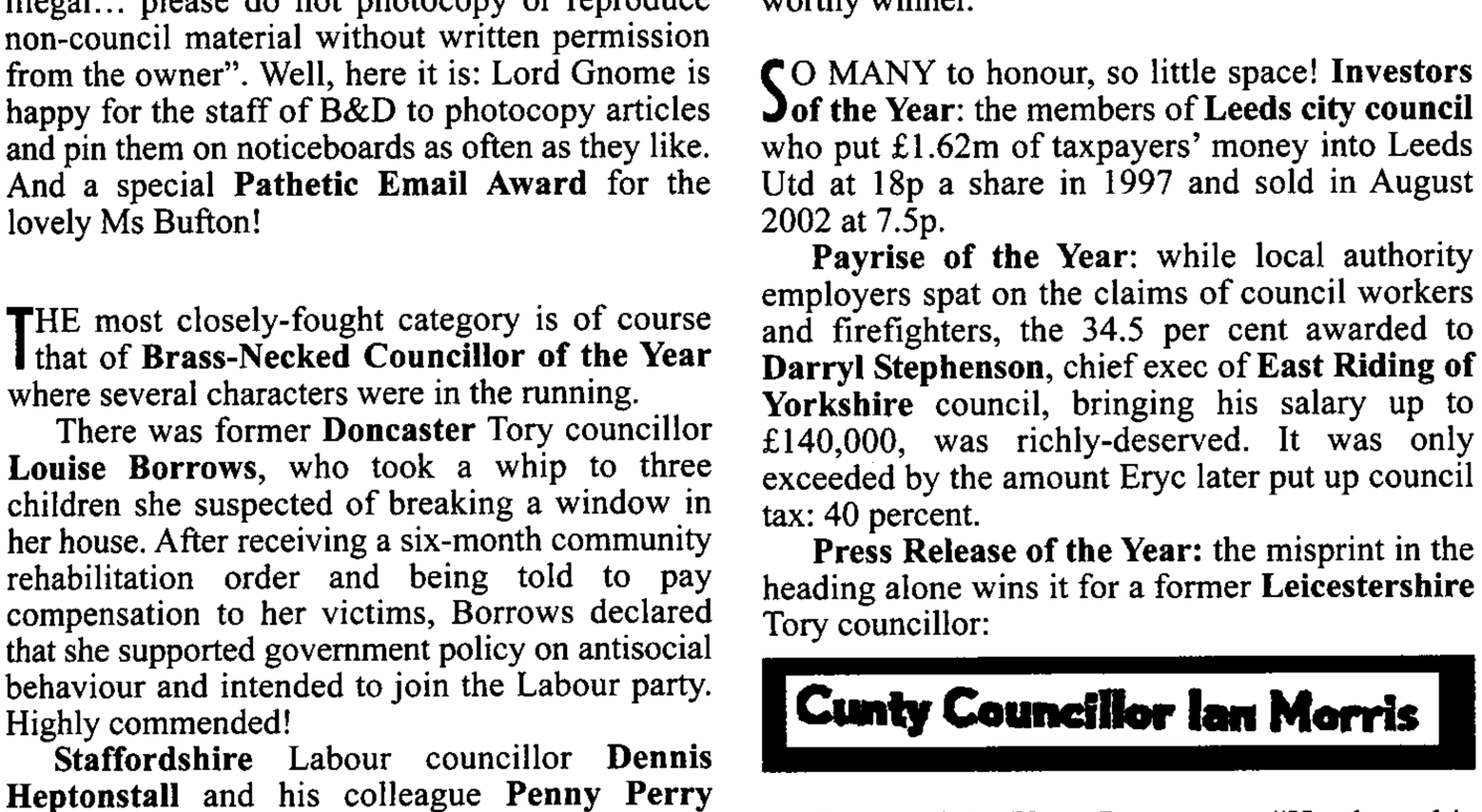
THAT jingling you can hear, by the way, is not the bells on Santa's sleigh, but the sound of prison keys turning as a bumper crop of councillors celebrates the festive season behind bars. They are now all proud joint recipients of the **Rotten Boroughs Archer Award 2002.**

In December alone at least five have been banged up. Last week **Abdul Qadus**, 45, a Conservative member of **Dudley metropolitan borough council**, began a six-month sentence for countersigning a passport in the name of a man who had been dead for four years. On 10 December **Peter Stidworthy**, 47, a Tory on **Coventry city council**, was jailed for 21 months after pleading guilty to one charge of indecent assault, and more than 20 charges of making and possessing indecent images of children. Police found more than 4,000 child porn photos on his computer. Former **Derbyshire** Labour county councillor **Clifford Fox**, 55, was jailed for 21 months on 9 December after admitting stealing £24,000 from a parish council for which he worked as clerk. The day before Fox went down former Labour councillor **Ray Race**, 56, and Lib-Dem **Michael Hayward**, 41, were jailed for four months and two respectively over an attempt to rig the vote at **Havant** in the May 2001 elections.

At the end of November former **Rotherham** Labour councillor **Garvin Reed** was jailed for three years. He had raided a charity set up to relieve poverty in the former coalfields and in the 1990s magnificently blew £172,000 of its money on booze, prostitutes and a "lavish lifestyle".

And then, as ever, there was **Doncaster**. In March property developer **Alan Hughes**, 63, was jailed for five years after bribing former Doncaster planning committee chairman **Peter Birks**, 58, with a £160,000 farmhouse. **Ray Stockhill**, 68, former mayor and deputy leader, was convicted of accepting £35,000 in bribes but received a suspended sentence because of ill health. Not to be outdone, Doncaster's former Tory group leader **John Dainty** was jailed in August for taking bribes from a different developer. He was the 31st person to be convicted in connection with Donnygate — 25 of whom were Labour councillors. Ho, ho, ho!


✦GRIM NATIVITY✦
KNIFE & PACKER
NO ROOM AT THE INN!
INN
AND SO JOSEPH AND MARY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE STABLE
STABLE?!? MORE LIKE A STUNNING OUTBUILDING WITH FABULOUS CONVERSION POTENTIAL!!
SMACK


✦GRIM NATIVITY✦
KNIFE & PACKER
WE HAVE SEEN A NEW STAR IN THE EAST AND HAVE FOLLOWED IT TO BETHLEHEM
WE BRING GIFTS OF GOLD, FRANKINCENSE AND MYRRH
RESULT! THAT'S PRETTY MUCH AN AROMATHERAPY STARTER-KIT!

NOOKS and CORNERS

MY PICTURE shows the Pre-Raphaelite room at Manchester City Art Gallery as it looked 20 years ago. Today it is spoiled, having fallen victim to the Millennium Mania which has affected so many art galleries and museums: the construction of a new wing or addition enabled by the easy availability of lottery money and the *cachet* of a fashionable modern architect.

This can be a blessing if it provides more gallery space and other facilities along with the inevitable new restaurant and shop. But it can also be a curse. The story of Manchester City Art Gallery is instructive, and depressing, for it confirms the truth that the power of knighted (and ennobled) architects is still increasing and ought to be diminished.

The gallery was created in 1882 and occupied the former Royal Manchester Institution in Mosley Street, a noble Neo-Classical building which was an early masterpiece by Sir Charles Barry, the great architect who designed the Houses of Parliament. In 1836 Barry designed the Athenaeum Club around the corner in Princess Street but in the Renaissance manner he used at the Reform Club in Pall Mall in London. This clubhouse was bought by the city of Manchester in 1938 as an extension to the Art Gallery, which then had two fine but separate buildings.

The obvious thing was to unite them and add further accommodation by building on the remainder of the urban block bounded by Mosley Street, Princess Street, George Street and Nicholas Street; but this could only be achieved with the advent of the heritage lottery in the 1990s.

In 1995 a competition for enlarging the Art Gallery was won by Michael Hopkins & Partners. The result opened (at long last) earlier this year and cost £35m. It is a building governed by an austere, modernist geometry, with an exterior of rectilinear concrete frame filled either by glass or stone panels framed by bronze strips. The large interior hall is dominated by two naked glazed lift-towers. It is all very cool.

As Raymund Ryan helpfully explained in the *RIBA Journal*: "Although the Manchester gallery aspires to contextuality, the synchronicity between the pragmatic and the spiritual tips towards a refined version of 1960s functionalism." And there is the problem, for 1960s modernism cared little for old buildings, let alone for colour, complexity and richness.

The first problem arose with the Athenaeum. Barry designed the building with the staircase behind an arched entrance in a separate, slightly recessed bay at the end of the side elevation. Hopkins wished to do away with this staircase bay for no other reason, it would seem, than to create a symmetrically balanced elevation along George Street largely designed by Michael Hopkins. Unfortunately he succeeded, so the Athenaeum now stands stairless in a mutilated state, its structural and spatial logic now rendered meaningless by the bland, concrete, steel 'n' glass new building abutting its rear. This might be tolerated if Hopkins had not also spoiled Barry's other building – the original Art Gallery, which was once a beacon of civilisation.

In deliberate reaction to the British habit of making fine British museum buildings as bland and boring as possible with white paint, hessian, partitions and dropped ceilings, Timothy Clifford (now director of the National Gallery of Scotland) and Julian Treuherz (now director of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool) set about restoring the 19th century building in the 1970s and early 80s. They succeeded in creating a glorious and historically appropriate setting for its works of art.

The painted decoration in Barry's entrance hall was restored and the (later) galleries given rich colour schemes enhanced with decorative friezes. This result was one of the glories of Manchester — until now.

The Hopkins addition need not have affected the interiors of the original building in any way. As first designed, a floor would have collided with the rear elevation but, following advice from the historian John Archer, a double-height glazed space was proposed which allows Barry's severe architecture to be enjoyed. All that was required was a first floor-level penetration of the stone wall to allow a bridge to connect with the Pre-Raphaelite room. Yet visit Manchester today and you find that all the 19th century galleries have been blandly redecorated and feebly rehung. Even in the central Pre-Raphaelite room the decorative friezes – executed in gold leaf – have been partly painted over, while all the galleries have been spoiled by new concrete lighting troughs hung from the ceilings. Public money has been spent to wreck something fine achieved with public money only 20 years ago. Why?

The official explanation is that the galleries were damaged during building work and would have cost too much to restore. But surely the contractor would be liable for that? The real reason is that the wretched architects – Michael Hopkins and Partners – wanted the decoration removed so the old rooms would "harmonise" with the new. In other words, the richness and splendour of the "Clifforded" 19th century galleries would have shown up the sterile blandness of the Hopkins work.

Clifford put sculpture in the entrance hall and furniture, ceramics and other decorative arts works in the galleries to complement the paintings. All this has now been removed. Why? And where has it all gone?

The extension of the Manchester City Art Gallery is not exceptional but it is not that bad. However, in realising the complete scheme, the splendid and really *beautiful* interiors of the original building, a masterpiece by Barry, have been gratuitously spoiled. Hence it wins the Sir Hugh Casson Medal for 2002.

'Piloti'

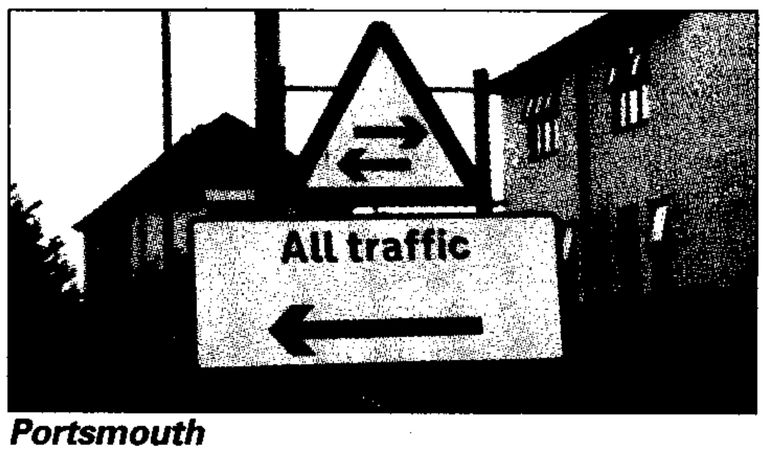
Pudsey, Yorkshire

I-SPY

Submitted by David Sellwood and Roger Willbourn.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)



Portsmouth

Warballs

"It was with great disappointment and anger that I read Leslie Bennetts's article on my sister Heather Mills… Journalists have the privileged ability to reach the public, and after the tragic events of 11 September, it's a shame they have not learned to use this advantage to help and inform people, rather than spread malicious gossip."

— Letter from Fiona Mills in *Vanity Fair*.

"As a father, an actor, a film-maker and a patriot, my visit to Iraq is for me a natural extension of my obligation – at least, attempt – to find my own voice."

— Sean Penn, *Washington Times*.

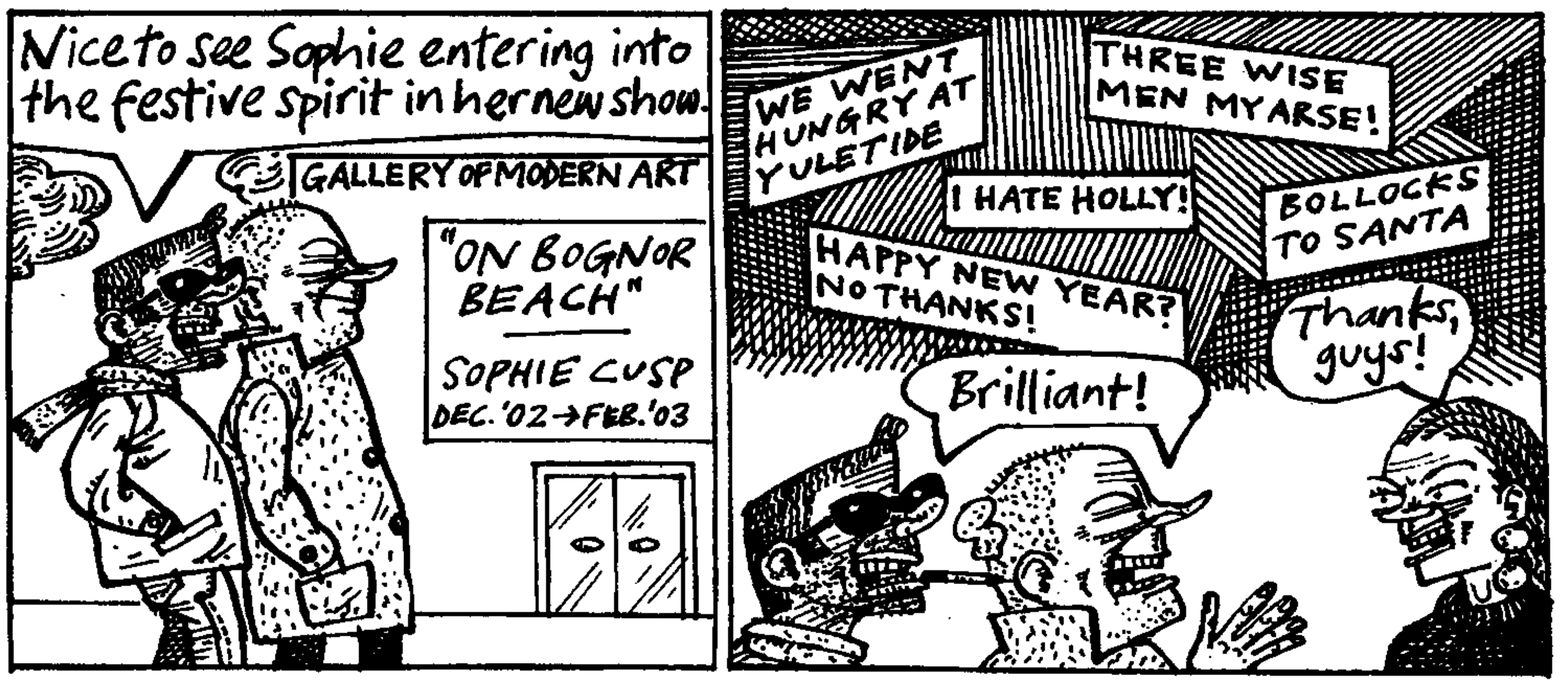
O·B·N

"Burke's Peerage extends Christmas greetings to all Imperial Royal and Noble families throughout the world. We wish them a happy, prosperous and secure holiday season, and appreciate the support that they are giving to his Royal Highness al-Sharif Ali bin al-Husain, the future King Ali of the restored Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq."

HAROLD BROOKS-BAKER
Burke's Peerage Christmas Card
(Submitted by Bob Heys)

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH


Nice to see Sophie entering into the festive spirit in her new show.
GALLERY OF MODERN ART
"ON BOGNOR BEACH"
SOPHIE CUSP
DEC. '02 → FEB. '03
WE WENT HUNGRY AT YULETIDE
THREE WISE MEN MY ARSE!
I HATE HOLLY!
BOLLOCKS TO SANTA
HAPPY NEW YEAR? NO THANKS!
Thanks, guys!
Brilliant!

In The Courts

THE Police Federation, used to bullying the press through its solicitors Russell, Jones and Walker (RJW), could come a cropper to the tune of more than half a million pounds thanks to the negligence of, er, Russell, Jones and Walker.

In 2000 RJW started libel proceedings against the *The Oldie* (a small-circulation magazine for retired folk), on behalf of three Lincolnshire police constables: Stuart Brinn, Andrew Jarvis and Paul Conway.

The previous year *The Oldie* had published two diary pieces about the case of Pauline Buffham, a Conservative county councillor who was arrested by the trio one night in January 1999 on a dark country road. *The Oldie* alleged that the officers, assuming they were dealing with a drunk driver, swore at Mrs Buffham, forced her into their car and drove her to a police station where a breath test revealed that she was stone cold sober. Months later, after the first *Oldie* piece appeared, she was charged with failing to stop for a constable. She pleaded guilty and was fined £250.

In May 2000, almost a year after the first article, RJW issued a libel claim form on behalf of the policemen against *The Oldie*. It then had a further four months in which to serve it. RJW, as is its custom in such cases, waited until the last minute before doing so. It was sent to the wrong address, however – so the time limit expired and the claim lapsed. After another libel action was begun in respect of the second article, the hard-up *Oldie* decided not to risk defending a costly libel case. It published an apology and paid Brinn and Jarvis £5,000 each. The third policeman, Conway, had by this time mysteriously dropped out of the action.

Backed by the bottomless pockets of the Police Federation, Brinn and Jarvis then went to another law firm, Gouldens, to sue Russell, Jones and Walker over their negligence in failing to serve the initial claim form correctly. The policemen said they had missed the opportunity of a big libel payout. Before the matter came to court the duo's solicitor, Barton Taylor, himself a former RJW man, moved to Peter Carter-Fuck and partners, and took the case with him.

RJW's defence was interesting. While conceding that it had been negligent in the way it served the claim form, it argued that Brinn and Jarvis did not suffer any loss or damage because of that negligence, because, er, their case was riddled with inconsistencies and contradictions which would have been exposed during cross-examination. There was a good chance that *The Oldie* could have succeeded in a claim of justification had the libel case come to court. (Yet, had RJW not botched the job, it would itself have pursued the very same claim with vigour!)

After a four-day hearing at the beginning of December, with Desmond Browne QC representing the policemen and Matthew Nicklin for RJW, the Hon Mr Justice Gray, whose wise judgment in the case of Condliffe vs. Pressdram was delivered a year ago) gave his verdict. Yes, he said, RJW had been negligent, as admitted; but no, Brinn and Jarvis could not have expected a vast payout from the *Oldie*.

Apart from the fact that *The Oldie* did not have any money to pay large damages, he said the magazine had alleged that "the claimants behaved towards Mrs Buffham, an innocent and respectable middle-aged lady, in an inappropriate and unprofessional manner". The judge said "these were serious allegations against police officers, whose reputation is of great importance both to themselves and to their force". However, "the circulation of the libel was limited". Although "there was some damage to the reputation of the two officers", few of their colleagues "would have been greatly influenced by a diary item in *The Oldie*".

Mr Justice Gray awarded the officers a total of £12,000. Alas, RJW had previously paid a larger sum into court, so Brinn and Jarvis – or rather the Police Federation – could now be liable for most of what the judge described as the case's "vast costs". He referred to Brinn and Jarvis's costs as being at least £280,000. But that did not take into account Carter-Fuck's involvement, or the costs of the trial, which could easily double that figure, let alone RJW's own legal costs.

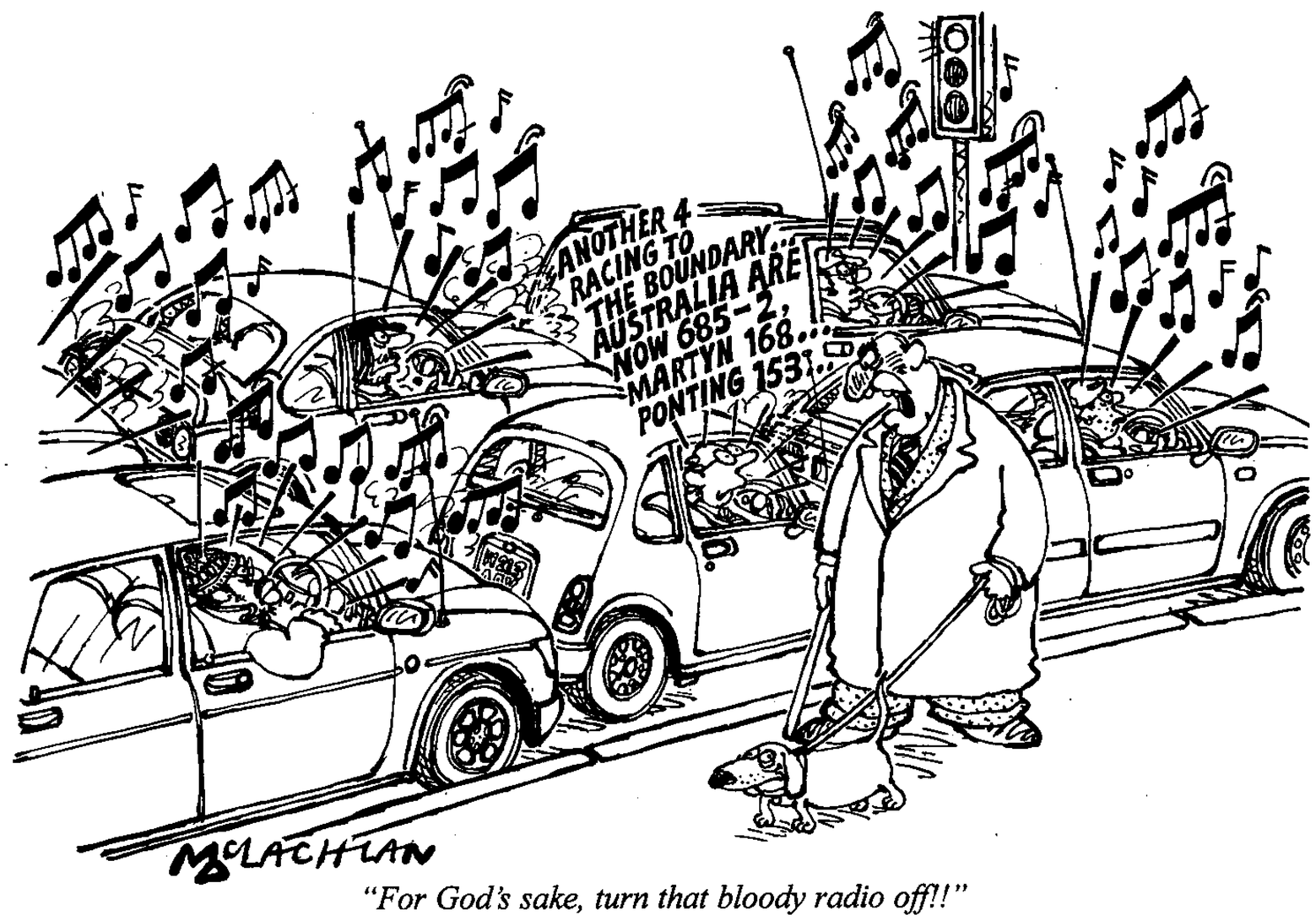
So after more than three years of pointless litigation, no one is any better off – except m'learned friends. And the taxpayer, who pays the wages of the policemen who pay their subs to the federation, could be more than £500,000 the poorer.

PS: What lay behind PC Paul Conway's sudden lack of enthusiasm for clearing his name? The fact that in 2000 he pleaded guilty to "a serious public order offence" and was dismissed from the police force may have had something to do with it. Lincolnshire police, despite several requests, have so far failed to provide details of that offence. Perhaps a reader can help?

Press Release

"The aggressive 'homosexual lobby' appear to have their fingers into everything" stated a UK LifeLeague spokesman...

UK LifeLeague



"For God's sake, turn that bloody radio off!!"

UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

FOR a procedure that singularly does not require their presence, it is incredible how much bollocks has been talked on the subject of human cloning.

When Dolly the sheep was cloned from an udder cell taken from an adult Dorset-Finn ewe in 1996, some commentators were quick to pronounce the end of the world as we knew it. The advent of mammalian parthenogenesis was greeted with moral hysteria and predictions that cloning would mean everything from the end of men, the degeneration of society and of family to the development of a Nazi super-race. After the announcement of Dolly in 1997, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* featured a row of cloned Hitlers on its front cover, highlighting the public fear that human cloning was just around the corner. All ludicrous nonsense.

Yet the hysteria goes on. In November the Italian fertility expert Dr Severino Antinori – a sort of Lord Winston gone over to the Dark Side – announced that the first human baby clone would be born in a few weeks. Then his colleague-turned-rival Panayiotis Zavos said he too was ready to clone. Cue a new rash of silly headlines.

So what is and is not true about human cloning? Firstly, cloning will not and cannot lead to the creation of armies of Saddam Husseins or Adolf Hitlers. Even if you cloned Saddam, the resulting baby would be his biological twin – but 64 years younger. He would not *be* Saddam any more than normal twins are the same person as their brother or sister.

Secondly, cloning will *always* be a difficult, dangerous and very expensive way to make a baby – far more difficult, say, than conventional IVF. It is unlikely that even if human cloning is perfected and sanctioned that there will ever be more than a few hundred clones alive at any one time; and their effect on the gene pool, society, the position of men, etc, will be zero – just as zero as the effect of natural twins.

Thirdly, no one has yet cloned a human being. This is not because it is impossible. When Dolly was a lamb, many respectable scientists rushed to proclaim that human cloning would be so difficult that it was effectively forbidden by the laws of biology. It is now clear that these early denials had as much to do with the scientists' wish to distance themselves from dodgy characters like Antinori than it was a statement of scientific fact.

Antinori announced, last April, that he already had a clone on the way. This alleged baby has yet to be seen. The smart money is on him telling porkies.

Fourthly, notwithstanding the fact that it will be tried, cloning is dangerous and silly, at least at the moment. Cloned animals are, for the most part, rather unhealthy. There is the unresolved question of premature ageing. Dolly has a touch of arthritis (although it must be said she is looking remarkably well for a seven-year-old sheep). Most importantly, cloning results in an extremely high proportion of deformed and unviable foetuses. This procedure, when applied to humans, will inevitably cause great distress and misery.

It is not only cloning that has the ability to generate such hysteria. A related subject, that of "designer babies", has generated headlines almost as silly. When scientists last year found a way to detect embryos with a rare genetic deformity and reject them for IVF implantation, the "perfect baby" headlines were as predictable as they were inaccurate. No one has yet found a way to make babies that are bluer of eye, blonder of hair or quicker of brain than would happen naturally; such "advances" are decades, probably centuries away, if they can be done at all.

Michel Houellebecq recently wrote a rather good novel called *Atomized*, the plot of which centred around the perfection of both human cloning and germline genetic engineering (designer babies). It was science fiction – just like most of what you read in the papers.

'Boffin'

Letters

PFI: a risky business

Sir,

Improving stubborn figures by introducing a risk factor (HP Sauce, 1069) is common practice in PFI bids: see Unison's excellent document "Understanding the Private Finance Initiative" (Rowland & Pollock, Unison, Jan 2002) pp 23-24.

In the current York schools PFI project, the executive summary of the Outline Business Case (OBC) gives the PFI cost as £11.1m, with the projected Public Sector Comparator (PSC) better value at £10.3m. But adding an estimated risk figure of £1.4m to the PSC makes it a less attractive £11.7m! The OBC itself, which presumably explains the build-up of this risk figure, is not public. For the executive summary and other info, see www.yorkpfiwatch.org.uk.

But please, don't blame those in the City of York Council who produced this PFI bid. The basic Catch-22 is shocking, but not of their choosing. They knew very well that if the PSC figure they submitted to central government came out as better value than the PFI figure, York wouldn't then get publicly funded schools: it would simply get no new schools at all!

So every PFI bid submitted (3 out of 4 fail) is forced to provide the government with further "proof" that PFI is better than honest public spending. Simple, isn't it?

Please keep up the revelations on PFI!

Yours faithfully,
JOHN HEAWOOD, ROBERT BRIGGS,
York PFI Watch.

Trumpton charges

Sir,

For Chrissakes, can't anyone ever get it right? Your John Prescott: the early years cartoon in Eye 1069 (very funny, even though Geoff Thompson drew wee Johnnie as an overweight Anne Widdecombe) cited the Trumpton firemen, sorry, fighters, as Pugh, Pugh, Barley, McGrew etc. It is, or was, Pugh, Pugh, Barney McGrew (ie one guy with first and second names), Cuthbert, Dibble and Grubb. Geoff may have amnesia or defective hearing since childhood, but I would have thought more of the editor, especially as I seem to recall some equally sad correspondent as I in your pages correcting such a howler a few episodes ago.

AUSTIN LAFFERTY,
Via email.

"Oh no! Santa's suing us for geting stuck in the chimney"

Forensic evidence

Sir,

Boffin's little piece (1069) is an entertaining read – at least to those who enjoy examining the bugs found on dead bodies – but actually it inhabits a fantasy world of its own.

Dr Zak was a respected scientist, a man of high principle who at the time of his death was working on a scheme under which forensic scientists would offer their services for free, avoiding the taint of money changing hands. I know that young journalists are always ready to do this, but I suspect it would not have become the norm in most professions.

As for CRFP, where are the "impressive offices" your chap is on about? He certainly hasn't seen these three Dickensian rooms close by London's fashionable Euston Station. Bob Cratchit would have found them cramped. What is impressive is the way we are running a national organisation with barely a skeleton staff: no bugs on us. And we've only been here a few months, moving off the landing in someone else's building where we lodged in Jack Straw's day.

Our foundation was nothing to do with the opening up of the market for forensic science. It goes back to the high profile miscarriages of justice that came to light in the early 90s, and was born of forensic scientists' own determination that their colleagues must not be allowed to let down the system.

Cleaning out the stables? No, we're not. British forensic science is the envy of much of the world, a product where in many fields we are world leaders. But a toothless tiger? Ask the people going through our assessment procedure, exposing themselves to an independent review more rigorous than anything tried before in this field. By this time next year scientists will regularly be asked in court whether they are registered with us – and if not, why not. If something goes wrong they will run the risk of being struck off the register, and in effect unable to do further forensic work.

Yours sincerely,
ALAN KERSHAW,
Chief Executive, Council for the Registration of Forensic Practitioners.

Lookalike

Kennewick man

Jean-Luc Picard

Sir,

I was recently struck by the remarkable resemblance between the prehistoric American 'Kennewick man' and legendary Starship commander Jean-Luc Picard.

Is it possible that Starfleet's temporal experiments have gone horribly wrong?

Yours faithfully,
MIK ATKINSON,
Stardate 29 41 point 3.

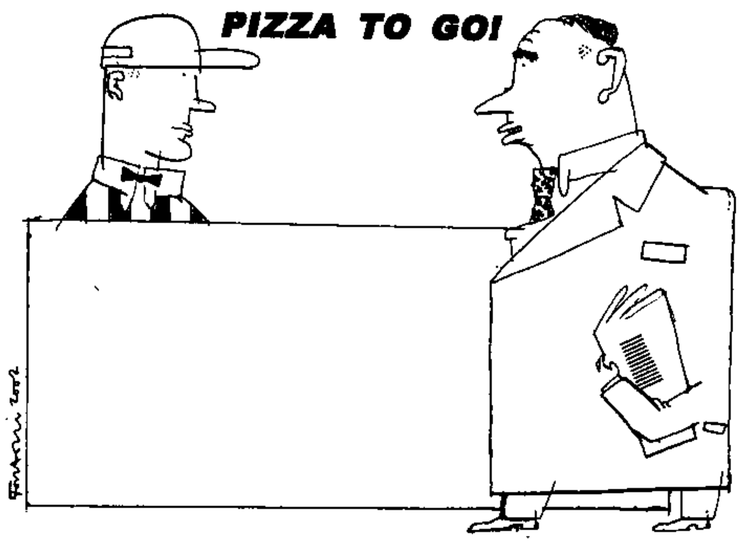
A real pedant writes

Sir,

Good to see your TV reviewer mentioning that Aled Jones didn't sing "Walking in the Air" in "The Snowman". However, if he was a real pedant, he would know that it was Peter Auty, not Paul Auty who sang it (check out the entry on the Internet Movie Database). The Radio Times has made the same mistake, but I can't be bothered to point it out to them.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,
NICK HUTCHINGS,
Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Yes, okay, I'll have all the toppings... Yes, garlic bread as well, good idea... I'll have some chicken wings too, thanks... Side salad? Why not?... Ice cream... great... Coke... coffee... Yes, everything, please"

Bollox maximus

Bone Vir,

re Oculus Privatus MLXIX

Davidius Beckhamius, manus Britannici pedeballi dux audax atque celeber, non uxor Poshi (Poshae?) verum maritus eia est.

Vale,
S.W. SHAW,
Via email.

A wizard from Oz

Sir,

Your review (1069) of Thomas Keneally's latest offering bemoans Australia's "navel-gazing obsession with the past" and an absence of contemporary fiction worthy of recognition by literary prize committees.

Tim Winton is an internationally acclaimed young Australian author who was shortlisted for the Booker in 1995 for The Riders, and again in 2002 with Dirt Music. Both of these books are, you may be surprised to hear, "confident modern novels".

Yours sincerely,
ROBERT BOON,
Chorlton, Manchester.

Sir,

Bookworm may lament the state of the modern Australian novel but don't blame Matthew Kneale (Eye 1069). When we were at school together in the 1970s in West London there wasn't a trace of an Aussie accent and Friends Reunited reports that he is now living in Italy. Since Shakespeare, it has proved possible to write about a country without being a national.

GRAHAM BEARMAN,
Via email.

Stereo typing

Sir,

D.F. King (dis)credits me with an MA in Queer Theory (losing the bet, as it's in Art History) – and seems to assume I'm gay (Letters, 1069). It's a shame you didn't print the rest of my letter, where I went on to say how much Private Eye makes me laugh; I like to ridicule stereotypes as much as anyone, but I think there's a difference between sending up a stereotype and reinforcing it. Call me oversensitive, but I thought the cartoon in question crossed the line between satire and offensiveness. I guess I'm not the only one – see "Well read" on the same Letters page for a similar observation. As for making Peter Tatchell look like Dale Winton, I suppose I should be flattered, but, as anyone who knows me will tell you, I'd be horrified at the idea of resembling either of them in any way!

Regards,
PETER JENNETT,
Via email.

Lookalike

Abu Hamza

Richard Wilson

Sir,

Lookalike or just look out for pirates?

All best,
PETER CUNDALL,

London NW1.

Barney in Barnet

Sir,

Steve Warner (Letters, 1069) is quite correct when he says that "others will give you the facts" about Barnet FC. It is a pity he didn't. The fact is that Barnet FC ***did not*** *buy their freehold. It was sold instead to a completely independent private company owned by the chairman personally. The fact is that whilst the club may have been in existence for 114 years, the green belt has been around for considerably longer and the overwhelming majority of residents want it to stay that way. The fact is that the council is not run by Brian Coleman. He is a mere cabinet member. As to whether Mr Coleman is obnoxious, Mr Warner might wish to consider the adage relating to stones and glass houses.*

Your other correspondent John Lewis has similar problems with facts. The fact is the council knew full well that the potential development value of the land was £5.7m because the borough valuer told them. Council officers had previously advised that the site could not be defended in the green belt because it was surrounded by houses on three sides. The land therefore had considerable speculative value alone which the chief executive admits was substantially greater than the measly ten grand paid by Tony Kleanthous.

Mr Lewis is also completely wrong in his understanding of the delegated powers report which contains the so-called typing "error". The intention was for the purchaser to share the future development value with the council, with the precise division of the proceeds varying according to the circumstances of the sale. But as a result of the mistake, Mr Kleanthous is now able to sell the land after 10 years, irrespective of what happens to the club, and keep the entire proceeds himself without the council being able to do anything about it. If Mr Lewis has read the report properly he would have understood the implications of the error; or perhaps his grasp of English is as good as whoever was responsible for writing it.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID MILLER,

Barnet, Herts.

Farcical

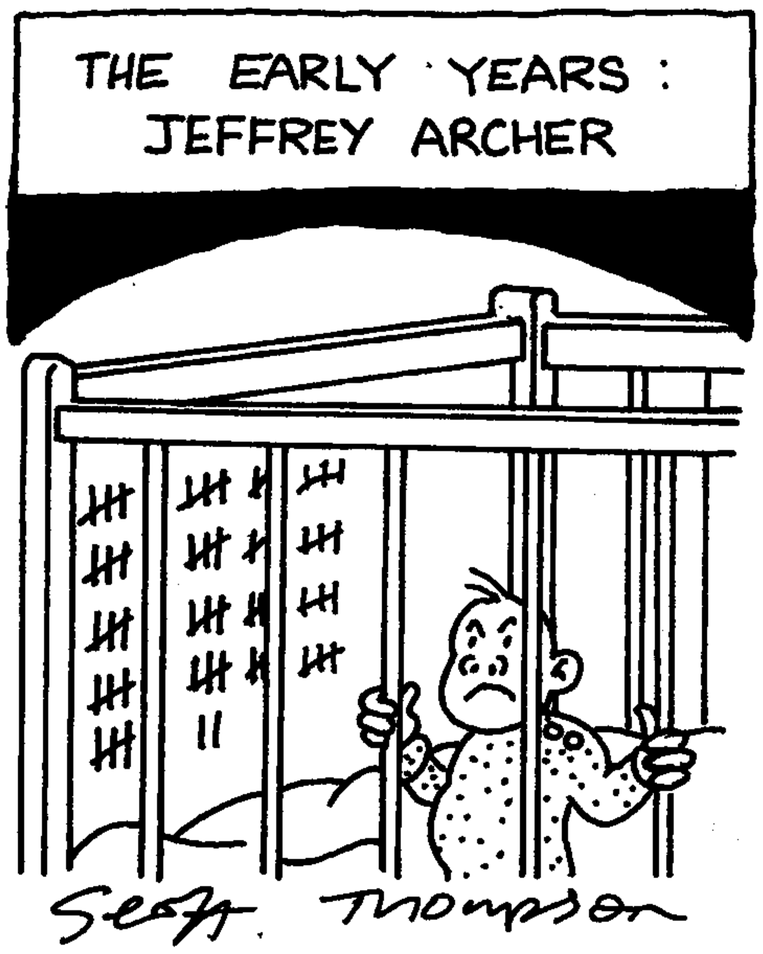
Sir,

I wouldn't have thought attacking the SFO was the most difficult of tasks but your Slicker does make rather a mess of it (1069).

The perverse decision of Mr Justice Laws not to gaol Roger Levitt could not have damaged the office's credibility in the eyes of anyone with any knowledge of the criminal justice system. Prosecutors do not argue for a particular sentence. A judge going haywire when sentencing is very different from, say, a jury verdict which it is the SFO's job to influence. Then with curious logic Slicker in one breath condemns the Office for slack preparation, "assuming Micawber-like that evidence would turn up", but in the next alleges over-preparation, taking "the Julie Andrews climb every mountain approach". You can't be both Micawber and Julie, and this contradictory nonsense might even lead the SFO to start thinking it has got the balance right.

Yours faithfully,
RICHARD COLBEY,

Temple, London EC4.



Colemanballs-up

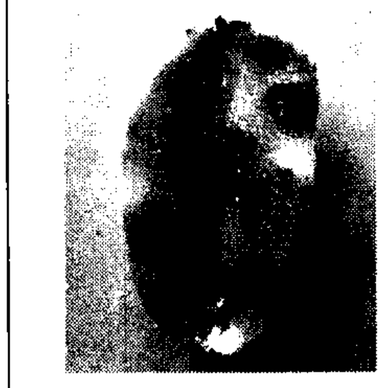
Sir,

It is a pity your compiler of Colemanballs (1069) knows nothing about cricket.

Ian Botham is quoted as saying on Sky Sports: "England need to pick players who do not have skeletons in their coffins." Far from being a balls-up, this is a rather clever remark. The huge leather bags containing their gear, which cricketers drag from dressing room to dressing room, are in fact called coffins.

Yours,
JEREMY BRIEN,

Bristol.



Dear Private Eye,
Enclosed is a peanut with the face of Jesus. I hope you can put a picture of the famous face in your excellent magazine which my whole family enjoys.

Yours faithfully,
Lizzy Slomka,
age 10.

Muck spreading

Sir,

If I am the real muckspreader (Letters, 1069) please start sending me free copies of Private Eye so that I know what I have written. Regular cheques would also be appreciated.

The rest of Edward Dawson's letter is as accurate as his first sentence. Let me guess – the self-styled "Cotswold Character" is a paid-up member of the NFU. For the benefit of urban readers NFU stands for No F..... Use.

Yours sincerely,
ROBIN PAGE,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

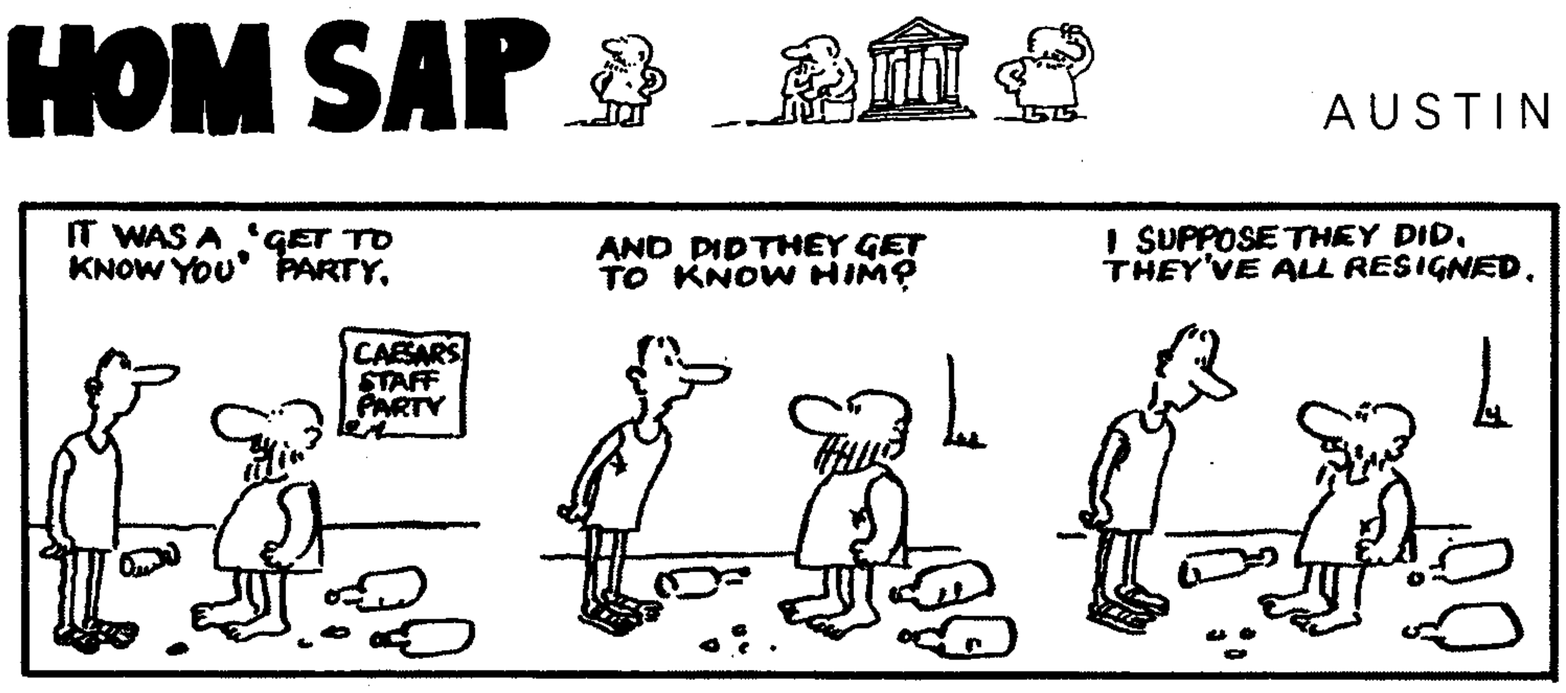
"Fennel has a fennel flavour."
GARY RHODES
(Jennifer Dodd)

"It's only a matter of time before the end of this innings."
MICHAEL PESCHARDT, BBC
(Peter Kirkham)

"What they find will depend on what is there."
Arab League spokesman, BBCWorld Service
(Andrew Philp)

Brian Hamilton: *I think in the end it will be down to Manchester United and Arsenal.*
Victoria Derbyshire: *So you clearly haven't ruled out Liverpool then?*
Radio 5 Live
(Andy Holliman)

"... and now [Burnley] have got an extra yard of doubtness in their minds"
CHRIS KAMARA, Sky Sports 3
(Glenn Smith)


HOM SAP
AUSTIN
IT WAS A 'GET TO KNOW YOU' PARTY.
CAESARS STAFF PARTY
AND DID THEY GET TO KNOW HIM?
I SUPPOSE THEY DID. THEY'VE ALL RESIGNED.

Letter from **Istanbul**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE quality of mercy is not strained is a saying that must have occurred to many here in Istanbul recently when considering our strangely forgiving legal system.

Four policemen charged with beating and torturing to death trade union activist Suleyman Yeter back in 1999 recently benefited from this previously hidden side to Turkey's judicial arrangements. Found guilty by Istanbul's serious crimes court, they were first sentenced to the merciful term of one year in jail. But then, as they seemed "unlikely to do it again", as one of the judges explained, the jail terms were suspended!

The unfortunate Mr Yeter has now passed on, though it took long enough for the officers in question to achieve this result. They had arrested him previously in 1997, twice, and both times, according to the court, they tortured him badly. This, the single judge who objected to the verdict said afterwards, being a good example of how to use "torture as a method of finding evidence".

Judicial magnanimity has also been evident recently in the release of Alaattin Cakici, one of our most colourful mafia barons. Wanted by Interpol in connection with two murders – one of his wife – extortion, dodgy property deals and organising a massacre of leftist students during his "idealist" days in a right-wing death squad in the 1970s, he walked free in early December after serving only two years in a Turkish prison for minor offences.

He will be sorely missed by the prison guards, who ordered in his pizza or arranged a steady stream of visitors to his rooms – sorry, cells. These provided all the comforts – TV, DVD player, fridge etc – one expect from a penal system as magnanimous as ours. Perhaps the prison officers will also miss his tales of how he was involved in the Susurluk incident, with which he is widely associated.

This happened in 1996 when a car carrying Cakaci's friend and fellow mafia hit man, Abdullah Catli, Catli's girlfriend, a member of parliament for the then-ruling True Path party, and a former Istanbul police chief crashed in the town of Susurluk, killing everyone except the MP. In the boot police found bags of heroin, guns and diplomatic passports (similar to the one French police found on Cakici when they arrested him on an Interpol warrant in Nice in 1998).

Issuing the documents for the ill-fated passengers in Susurluk was none other than True Path party interior minister Mehmet Aga. His moniker also turned up on the pass found in Catli's possession which gave him free access to the Turkish parliamentary car park, a godsend given Ankara's lack of parking space. Strange though that the interior minister at the time denied ever having met Catli, given that they must have met by the Grand National Assembly's ticket machines.

Anyway, in a sign that this really is a time for forgiveness, despite being forced out of office in 1997 due to the Susurluk scandal, Mehmet Aga was voted back into office as an independent MP in November's elections. He is now widely tipped to become True Path's new leader, his independence somehow vanishing the moment the party's leader Tansu Ciller announced her intention to resign.

Most forgiving of all though are our laws on parliamentary immunity. Under these, a refreshing wiping of the slate takes place: an opportunity for clean starts and new beginnings. More than 20 deputies facing criminal charges have now been given the chance to walk tall again thanks to victories at the ballot box. Meanwhile, it will be interesting to see what happens to the 81 outgoing deputies who lost their seats and their immunities and have, regrettably, outstanding cases against them. Only two are for murder though, so there's nothing much to worry about there.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "Sex is inherent in Barbie," Susanne Pitt told a court in New York, "and my range of Barbie Dungeon Dolls is simply commenting on her sexual overtones by placing her in a modern erotic context. Other artists have modified Mattel dolls without legal problems. And by trying to prevent me selling such models as my Nipple Pierced Filthy Dirty Bondage Barbie – dressed in lederhosen-style Bavarian-bondage dress and rubber helmet, with a PVC mask and waspie, and retailing at only $186 – I feel that the company is acting merely as a public censor."

Ms Pitt was defending herself in a legal action brought by Mattel, who argued that her line of Dungeon Barbies had violated the company's trademark. Denying their request for an injunction, Judge Laura Taylor Swain declared that "the dolls do not appear to pose any danger of usurping demand for regular Barbie dolls in the children's toy market. A different analysis would apply if Ms Pitt had, for example, simply dressed Barbie dolls in a different style of cheerleader outfit than those marketed by Mattel. But to the court's knowledge, there is no Mattel line of Nipple-Pierced Filthy Dirty Bondage S&M Barbie, and the sale or display of 'adult' dolls by the company does not appear to be likely. Therefore, it appears that there is slim to no likelihood that Dungeon Barbies would serve as a market substitute for Barbie dolls. Whether or not the Dungeon Barbies are in good taste is irrelevant to the legal argument." *(The Globe and Mail, 7/11/02. Spotter: Wallace Brown)*

— ● —

● *"The first we knew of this was when we received an emergency call, saying that an elderly man had burst into flames," an army spokesman told reporters. "We immediately sent a Green Goddess along, but by the time we got there, the fire had been extinguished. The man did not seem to be badly burned, just singed and very wet, but we did notice that his colostomy bag had melted, and we asked him why. And after further enquiries, we found out exactly what had happened.*

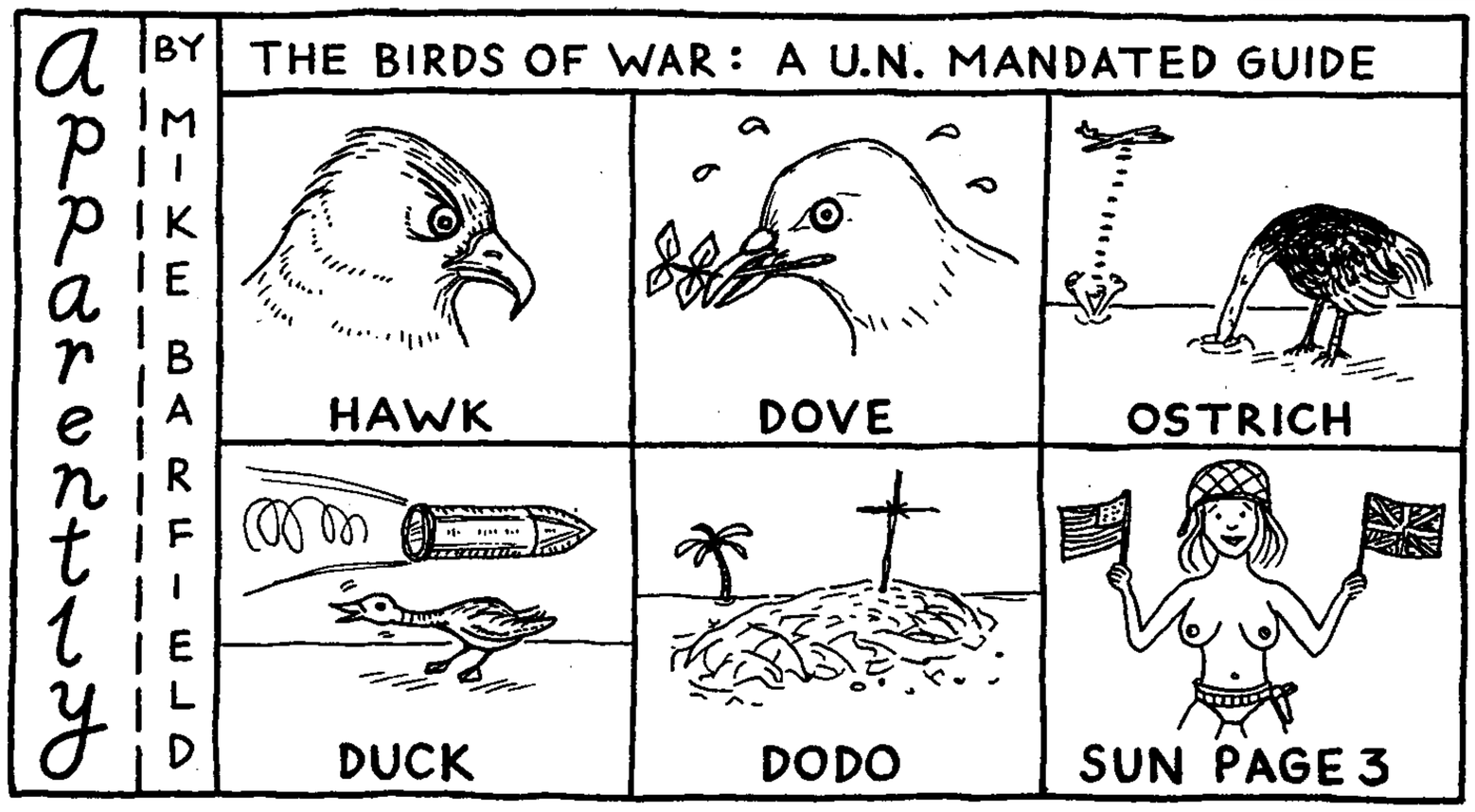
"Apparently, the man had been standing at a bus stop, outside a shop, when he accidentally dropped his lit cigarette directly onto his colostomy bag. The smouldering cigarette burned through the plastic, the methane inside the bag ignited, there was a small explosion, and the man went up in flames. Luckily, the shopkeeper heard his screams, saw the flames, and realised what had happened. He rushed out with a kettleful of water, threw it over the man's burning clothing and colostomy bag, and managed to put out the fire by the time the Green Goddess arrived. The man was taken to hospital, but was not seriously injured." (PA News, 22/11/02. Spotter: Kirsty Gardner)

— ● —

● "Why are women still wearing bras during singsings?" asked Mewie Launa as the fifty-second annual Goroka Show got underway in the Eastern Highlands region of Papua New Guinea, "and why are we still seeing

underpants sticking out? Take off the bras and underpants at once, because they are not recognised in traditional PNG culture."

Warming to his theme, the highly respected community leader made an impassioned plea for greater authenticity at the festival. "I see that some performers have substituted plastic containers for traditional kundu drums, which are made of wood. That is bad enough, but the wearing of bras and pants is far worse. Our parents never did this, and it is not what our culture demands. Take off those bras and pants. Our culture is unique, and we should be proud of it, and not mix modern culture with what we have always learnt. Off with those bras and pants without delay, and let the singing begin." *(Brisbane Courier & Mail, 21/9/02. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)*



THE TIMES
LONDON 1985–1979

MR GILBERT'S WIDOW TO SUE SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN

by Our Special Correspondent

Sir Arthur Sullivan, the nation's most respected composer, has had a setback in his campaign to have the name of his partnership altered from the familiar "Gilbert and Sullivan" to "Sullivan and Gilbert".

Mr Gilbert's widow, Nanki Poo, has embarked on legal proceedings to restrain Sir Arthur, claiming that the success of the famous Savoy operas was due entirely to her late husband's genius. Sir Arthur, she told The Times, was "no more than a mediocre banjo-player who merely thought up a few tunes to go with my husband's immortal words".

BRITISH COCAINE AWARDS

by Our Special Correspondent **Jon Snow**

A GLITTERING line-up of stars from the world of cocaine gathered last night for the industry's biggest night of the year.

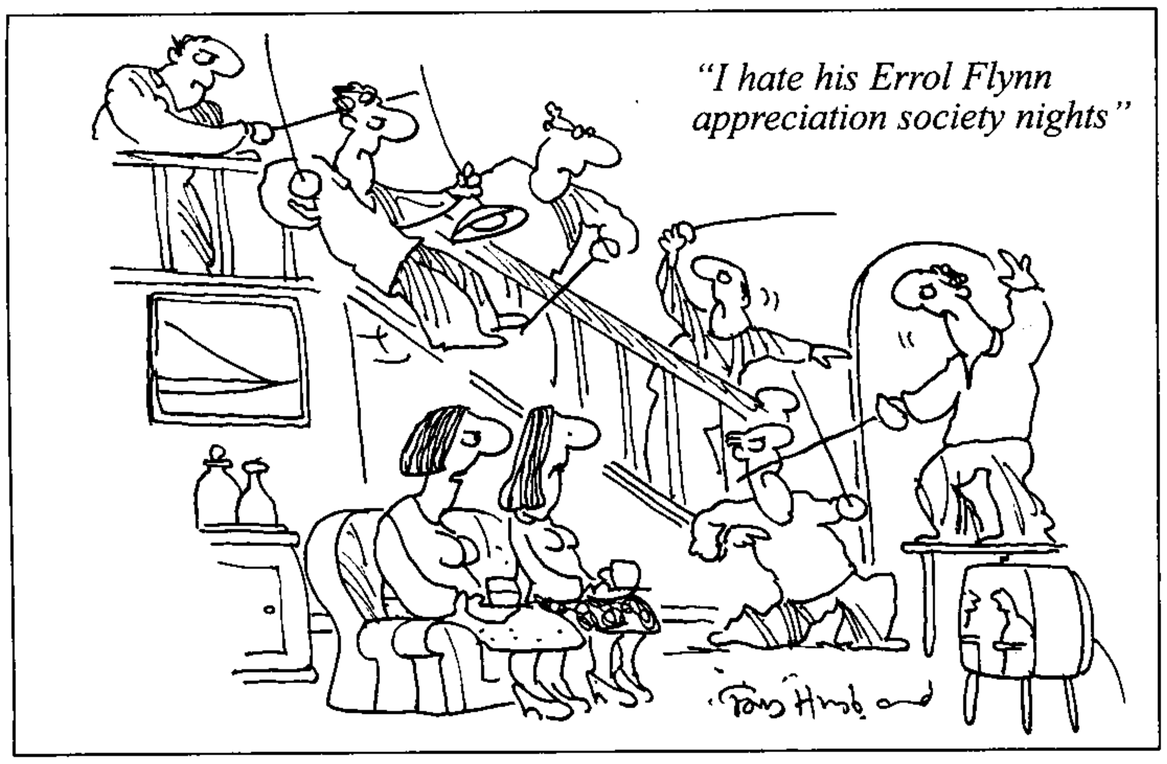
A showbiz expert said, "These awards are very significant, as they usually determine who will develop the costliest habit over the next twelve months – once again, standards were very high this year, but there again, not nearly as high as some of the nominees."

Stop Press

Man Arrested For Telling Joke In Toilet

Rail Announcement

Connex would like to announce the arrival of £58 million into its bank account – any customers expecting the service to improve as a result of this are advised to refrain from holding their breath. Thank you



TEARS AS LOST GIRL RETURNS SAFE

by Our Entire Staff **Phil Space**

THERE were scenes of undisguised grief in newspaper offices throughout Britain when a teenage girl was reported safe and sound yesterday.

As the terrible news sank in that the girl hadn't been murdered or subjected to a violent sexual assault, journalists wept openly in frustration and disappointment.

"We were looking forward to a whole month of special supplements," said one hardened hack holding back the tears, "but now we have nothing to fill up our pages."

There was a two-minute silence on the television news in the spot where they were hoping to show appeals by parents, traumatised schoolfriends, a community coming to terms with their loss and *(cont. p. 94)*

Counsellors coming to terms with not having been called to the disaster

IT'S HOGMONEY

Happy Fuggin' New Year!

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

Obviously I'd like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

But mine, I have to say, has been utterly ruined this year, and no prizes for guessing why!

Do you know, at one point I nearly didn't write this letter at all!

I felt ashamed, on your behalf, to be the vicar of the kind of parish where the vicar's wife has been subjected to the most hateful barrage of abuse and personal vilification since they tried to stone that poor woman in the Bible.

And what is her crime? Pray tell me that!

Is it that she tried to help her best friend Carole and her best friend's boyfriend when they needed a little bit of support at a difficult time?

Surely not! After all, isn't there something in the Good Book about the importance of being a true friend?

"I get by, with a little help from my friends," as St Paul put it in his *Letter to the McCartneyans (3.17)*.

Or is Cherie's crime that she thought pretty well the most important thing in the world was to look after her children?

Since when has that been something to be ashamed of?

Again, if we look at the Good Book, don't we find it written "Which one among you, if his son should ask him for a flat, would not give him two?" *(Book of Speculations, 8.16)*.

Or, was my wife's crime that she was too trusting, in her desire to see Mr Frodster given a second chance, when he generously offered to get a bit knocked off the asking price?

I can't see anything in Holy Scripture which condemns someone for getting the best possible deal when they are involved in wholly legitimate business transactions.

Don't we remember the Parable of the Talents, which I took as my text only last Sunday?

How there was one man who put his money in a pension fund, and lost it all? And the second man put it all into a PEP scheme, and was likewise impoverished?

But the third man, you will remember, put his money into property, and was rewarded "even an hundredfold". So, if Cherie is to be found guilty, just because she made a shrewd investment, then all I can say is that there are an awful lot of people in this parish who would be in the dock alongside her – good men, such as Mr Hinduja, Mr Sainsbury, Mr Levy, Mr Mittal and my good friend Mr Desmond (who has incidentally sent us a beautiful

"Asian Babes" advent calendar, which has been very popular apparently with the St Albion's scout troop!).

No, the simple truth is that Cherie has done absolutely nothing wrong!

And nor have I! I didn't know anything about any of it! It may well be that I went on holiday with Cherie's friend Miss Crackpot, but I can honestly say that I don't remember meeting her.

And why would Cherie be expected to tell me, if she was spending half a million pounds on a flat for her son?

This is Cherie's business. Unless of course we are the sort of parish that doesn't allow women to have their own business! The sort of parish where any woman independent-minded enough to become a success in her own right is at once stoned to death by pro-hunting supporters!

"But Vicar," I can hear our friend from Tesco's saying next time he meets me in front of the Organic Boeuf Français counter, "wouldn't it have been better if you had involved yourself a bit more in all this flat-buying business? Then perhaps all this mess wouldn't have happened."

And I have to admit that, were he to say this, for once our friend might have a point!

It's awfully easy for me, caught up as I am in all the really important matters involved in running a busy parish (such as supporting our good friend the Rev. Dubya in his crusade to rid the world of Satan), to overlook the small insignificant things on the home front, such as those involving Mr Frodster and Miss Crackpot.

Let me say, first, that I have nothing but admiration for Cherie! But if I had been kept informed as to what was going on, I can assure you that we would not now be reading in every issue of the St Albion's Gazette lurid articles about "Sleaze in the Vicarage", topless models showering naked with vicars' wives or people having colonic irrigation under plastic pyramids.

So, all I can say to everyone (including the much-respected editor of our local free-sheet, Mr Dacre) is, it's time to move on! You've had your pound of flesh! So let's draw a line under this and move on!

It really is time to stop harping on about these trivialities, and draw a line under them once and for all!

In fact, I've written a special hymn about this which we shall be singing at our service of New Year Re-Dedication (and indeed at all our services until people realise that it's time to draw a line under the whole business):

"Draw the line, draw the line,
Draw the li-i-i-ine.
Yes, it's time, yes it's time,
Yes, it's time to draw the line."

(Repeat)

(Words and music T. Blair)

And if any of you are interested, I'm going to start this New Year with one very firm resolution: to spend much more time with Cherie to ensure that nothing happens that I will need to draw a line under in 2003.

Yours in hope,

Tony

Announcements

■ **Mr Prescott** has decided to redesignate the churchyard as a "greenfield site" suitable for development with much-needed "affordable homes". He very much hopes that there will be room for 100 tastefully-designed homes, to be known as "Graveyard View", at prices ranging upwards from £550,000.

■ **Mr Darling** is appealing for suggestions on how to solve the parish's growing traffic problems. "If anyone has any bright ideas," he said, "please send them in, because I haven't a clue what to do." *(Thank you Alistair for being so honest! T.B.)*

■ **Mr Blunkett**'s new "Open Parish" idea is proving a huge success, so much so that we are going to have to cancel all functions in the Church Hall until further notice, because it is serving as a temporary "safe haven" for 550 refugees from the brutal French immigration regime.

Talks

Our parish treasurer Mr Brown gave a very interesting talk to the Parish Over-60s Club on how important it was for everyone to go on working until they die. "Just think how much cheaper it would be," he said, "if we didn't all of us have to spend so much money on old-age pensions. After all, didn't Methuselah in the Bible live until he was 938? And we don't hear about him asking for a pension."

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Parish Bring-and-Buy

There was a very good turnout for our annual Christmas jumble sale to raise funds for the Blind Trust. We were fortunate to have the vicar's wife to open the proceedings and she took the opportunity to make what she called 'A Personal Statement' about recent events in the Parish. She began by saying that she was not a 'superwoman', as many people seemed to think, but she was a working-mother, like many of the ladies present. She pointed out that, having a job and being a mother (and, of course, also being the Vicar's wife!), meant that she was like a juggler in the circus! It was hardly surprising, she went on, if sometimes one or two of the balls (or even all of them) fell to the ground! There was much laughter at this from several ladies present, including Mrs Short, Mrs Hodge and Mrs Roche!

Cherie then definitely won all our hearts when she admitted that sometimes she just felt like creeping away and hiding under a great big stone! She might have made a few mistakes, she admitted, but if she had, it was only because her one desire in the world was to protect her little boy, who was going away from home for the first time in his life and wouldn't have any Mummy to tuck him up in bed at night in his new flat. At this, all the ladies in the hall broke down in tears, and sang 'For She's A Jolly Good Fibber'. *(Surely this should be "fellow"? A. Campbell, Ed.)* Cherie ended by thanking Mr Mandelson for his help with her speech. She said she had seen his advertisement in the window of the Post Office, saying 'Handy Mandy For All Your Needs' and offering to do any odd jobs, particularly if it involved speech-writing, or negotiating house purchases. "He came round straightaway in his van," she said, "and what's more, he wouldn't accept any payment. 'Just mention my name to the vicar, missus,' he said, 'and remind him that his old churchwarden is still available.'" He had then given Mrs Blair his card bearing his well-known slogan 'I'm a fighter, not a quitter: I'm a writer, and I'm not bitter.'

Mrs Jowell then thanked the Vicar's wife for "her courage and her shining integrity". Mrs Blair very kindly then donated a pair of very glamorous white pointy boots, which she said she had only worn once and wouldn't be needing again, as the first prize in the raffle.

Mrs Blackstone then served everyone present with tea and some delicious GM fish-flavoured mince pies, kindly donated by Mr Sainsbury.

PARISH PORTRAITS

The vicar seizes the opportunity to win over the Islamic population and saves himself future embarrassments!

By local artist Mr de la Nougerede

To Remember In Your Prayers

Mr Robinson *(who isn't a friend of the Vicar's by the way, and never was – he is much more Gordon's friend actually)* who has sadly been caught by the police in a possible drink/drug/driving scandal. May he be judged wisely and although we don't know anything of the facts of the case, may he go to jail for a long time and cease to be such an embarrassment to the Vicar. T.B.

"It didn't take the Ad men long, did it?"

THE
INTERNATIONAL HEROD TRIBUNE

AD 0

MASSACRE OF INNOCENTS 'A SYSTEM FAILURE' Says Inquiry

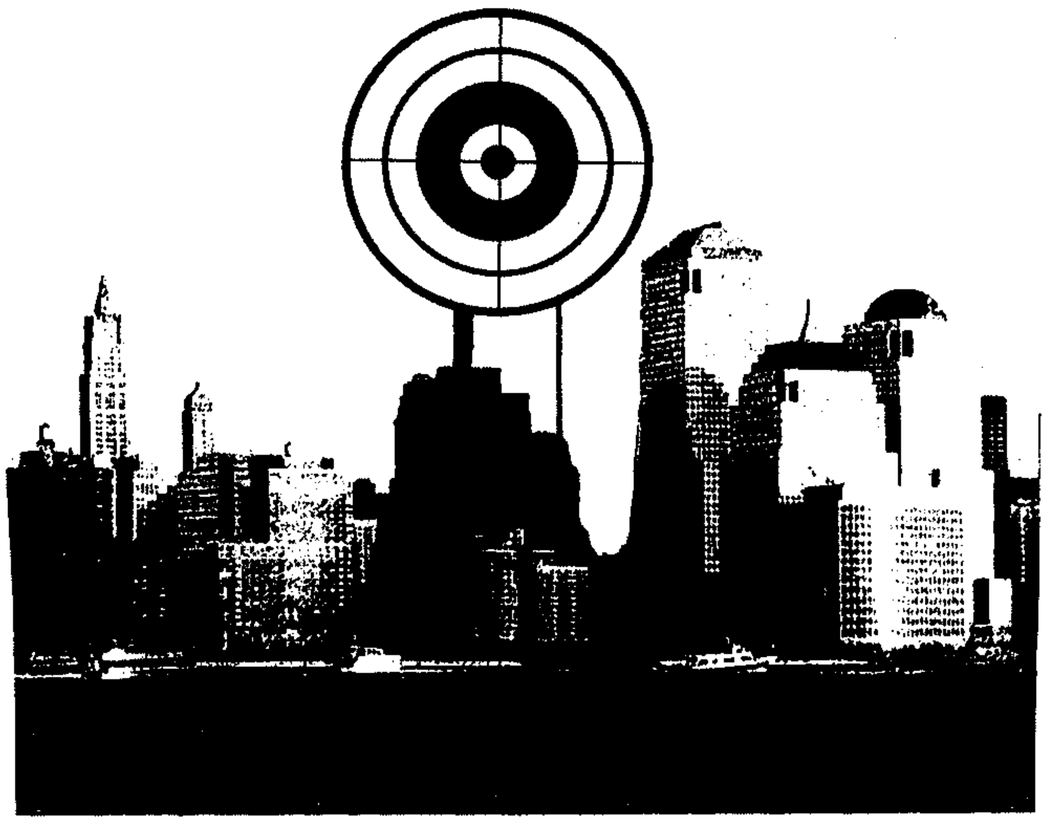
BY OUR CURRENT AFFAIRS STAFF FRANK INCENSED

A REPORT into the death of all children under the age of one in the Judean region has concluded that "a lack of communication" between departments in the Social Services was the main cause of the tragedy.

A spokesman for the Inquiry said, "Social Services and local health workers may have been alerted to the nature of King Herod and it is certainly true that he gave some indication of homicidal tendencies throughout his reign. When he issued an edict that all of the firstborn of the land were to be slaughtered there is an argument to say that the relevant authorities should have been aware of it and should have acted in some way. But the Inquiry has found that no one was to blame, apart from the system itself."

He concluded, "It is all very sad, but rest assured it will never happen again."

New Design To Replace Twin Towers



THE OFFICE Party
AND IF YOU BUY OUR FAX PAPER WE CAN GIVE YOU A 20% DISCOUNT
VODKA
YOU BASTARD! I'M PISSED AND YOU'RE NOT TAKING ADVANTAGE OF ME!
I'D RATHER BE AT HOME WATCHING 'THE OFFICE' ON VIDEO!
EVERYONE THINKS YOU ARE A PRICK!
BOSS
P 45
HEATH

ARCHER IN PRISON

Late News

OSCAR CONTENDERS NAMED

THE LOS ANGELES Film Critics Association have named their best films and performances of the year in what is thought to be a reliable guide to the 2003 Oscar winners.

"The two outstanding acting performances of the year are Jack Nicholson in 'About Schmidt' and Cherie Blair in 'I'm Not A Superwoman, I Was Only Doing What Any Mother Would' said the committee... *(cont. p. 94)*

HEWITT 'DEFINITELY A BASTARD'

DNA ANALYSIS of a single strand of James Hewitt's plan to sell Diana's love letters for ten million pounds to the highest bidder has revealed that he is a bastard.

"This comes as a surprise to no one," said a Royal... *(cont. p. 94)*

'NO RETIREMENT AT 65' CONCERNS GROW

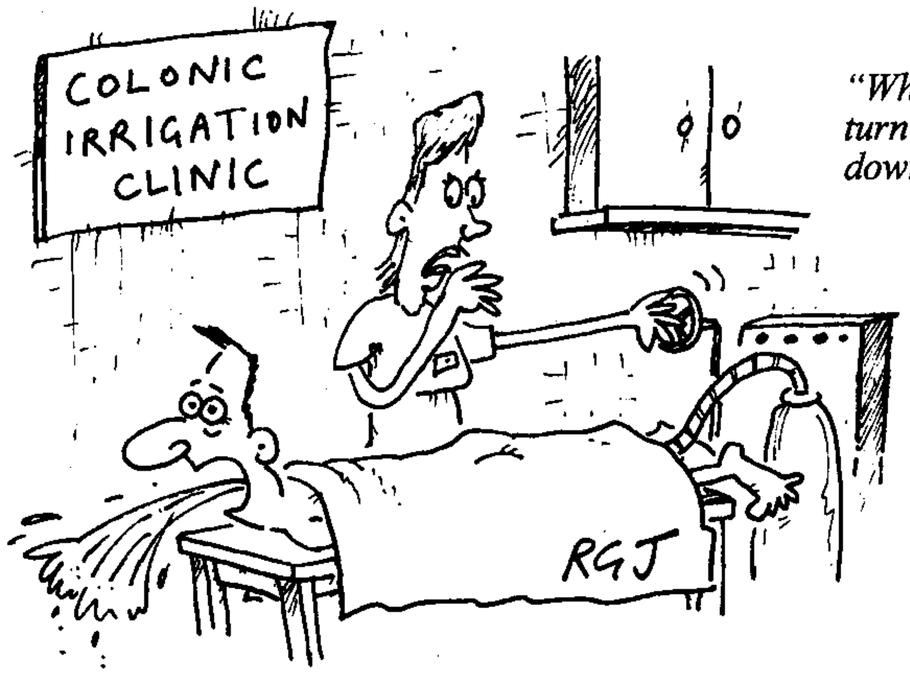
CONCERNS have been expressed that the Labour Government may be forced to continue in office beyond sixty-five years, as no provision has been made for its retirement.

"The Conservative party doesn't seem to realise that by putting off and putting off the day when they set aside Iain Duncan Smith as party leader," said one concerned Westminster watcher, "they are storing up considerable misery for themselves in the long hard years of opposition ahead.

"They need to act quickly to start saving themselves now."

THAT GOVERNMENT TEN-YEAR TRANSPORT PLAN IN FULL

- Transport Peter Foster to Australia...
- Now.
- Er, that's it.



"Whoops, I'll just turn the pressure down a tad"

COUGH'S BOGUS CV SHOCK

by Our Political Staff **Francis Wheeze**

IN AN amazing revelation last night, Mr Iain Duncan Cough was found to have lied on his curriculum vitae.

Amongst his various qualifications and job descriptions in the latest edition of *Who's He*, Duncan Cough claims that he is currently "the leader of the Conservative Party".

After a detailed investigation by reporters lasting several minutes, it has become clear that this is "a complete fabrication".

Said one expert, "He may well have been to meetings in Smith Square and certainly people have seen him in the building, but to say that he is leader is laughable."

Mr Duncan Cough buried his lie amidst a list of more credible details of his career, such as his degree in Astrophysics from the University of the Moon (formerly Sea of Tranquility Polytechnic), his doctorate in brain surgery from Oxford College, Cambridge and his best-selling novels including "Kane and Abel", "Not a Penny More" and "First Among Equals".

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Brad Dexter, film star

So. Farewell
Then Brad
Dexter.

You were one of
The Magnificent Seven.

I am not quite sure
Which one
You were
But I think you died
Quite early on
In the big fight
At the end.

For the theme tune
I refer you to
My earlier poem
On the death of
James Coburn –
The one with
The knife.

Even so, it is difficult
Not to think of it
As I write.

Dum. Di-da-da-dum.
Dum. Di-da-da-dum.

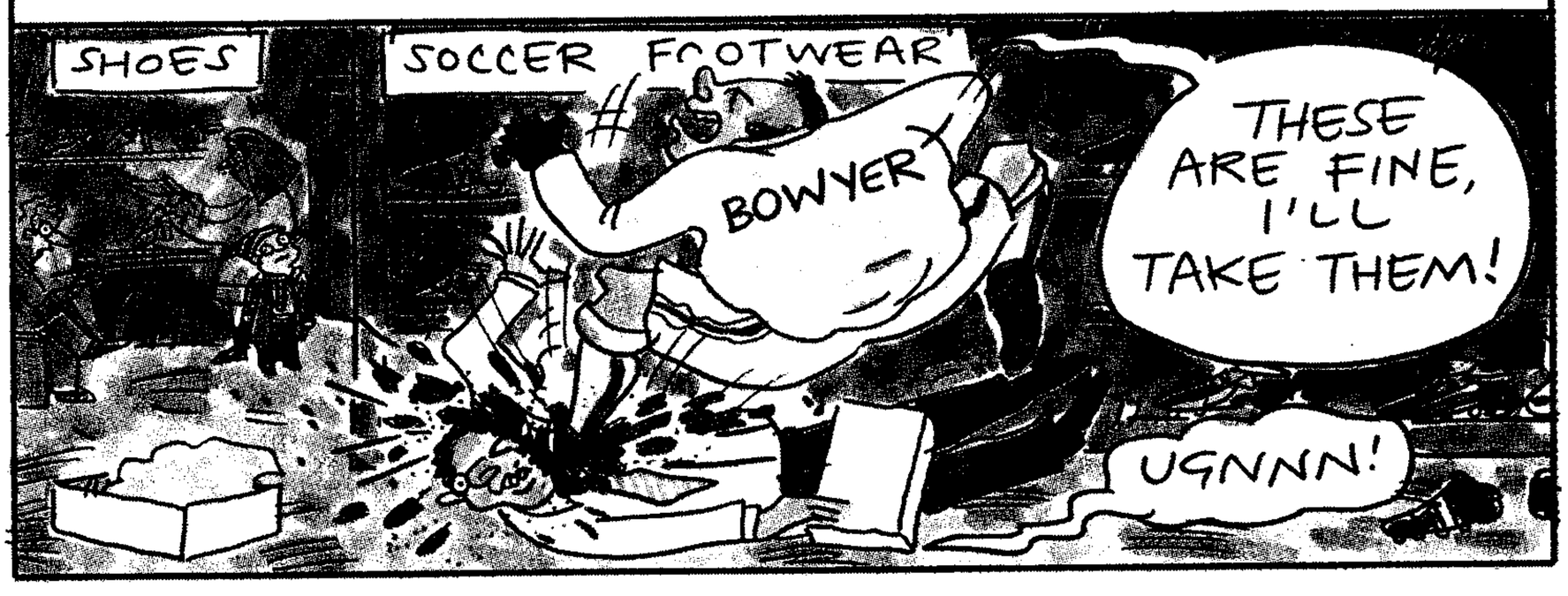
Then

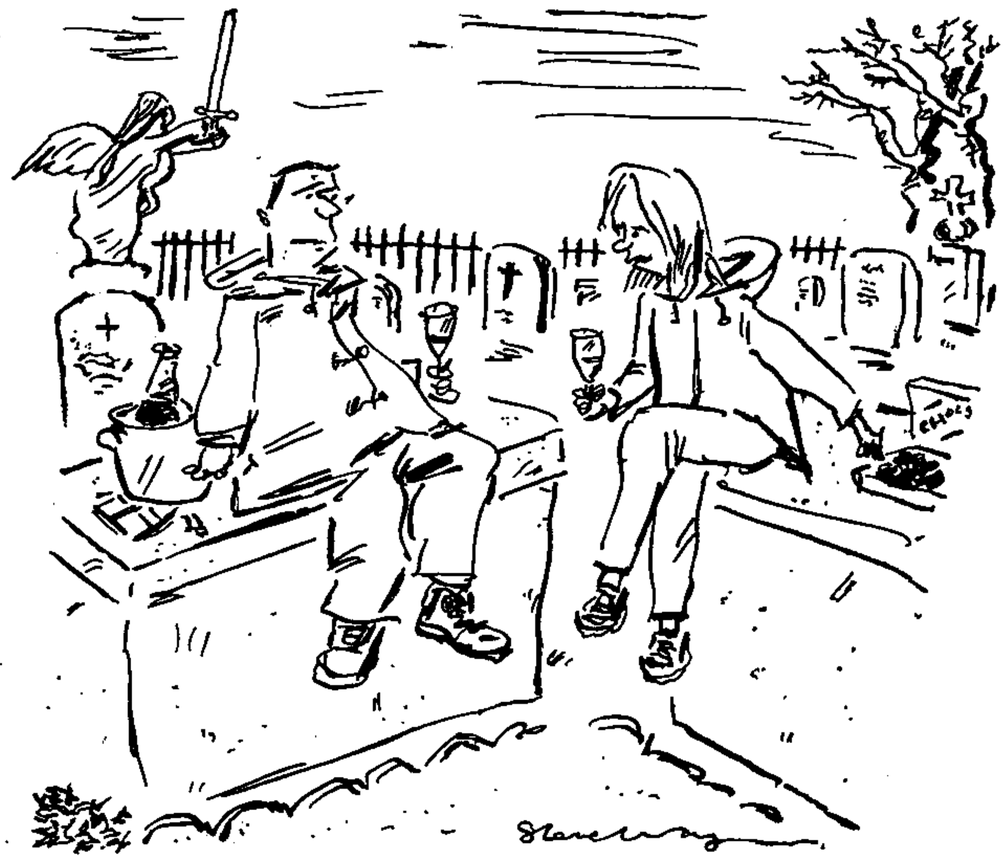
Da-da
Di-da-DA-da
(contd. p. 94)

E. J. Thribb
(The one with the poem)

the PREMIERSH*TS

PAUL WOOD





"Next year we spend Christmas at my *parents..."*

EXCLUSIVE

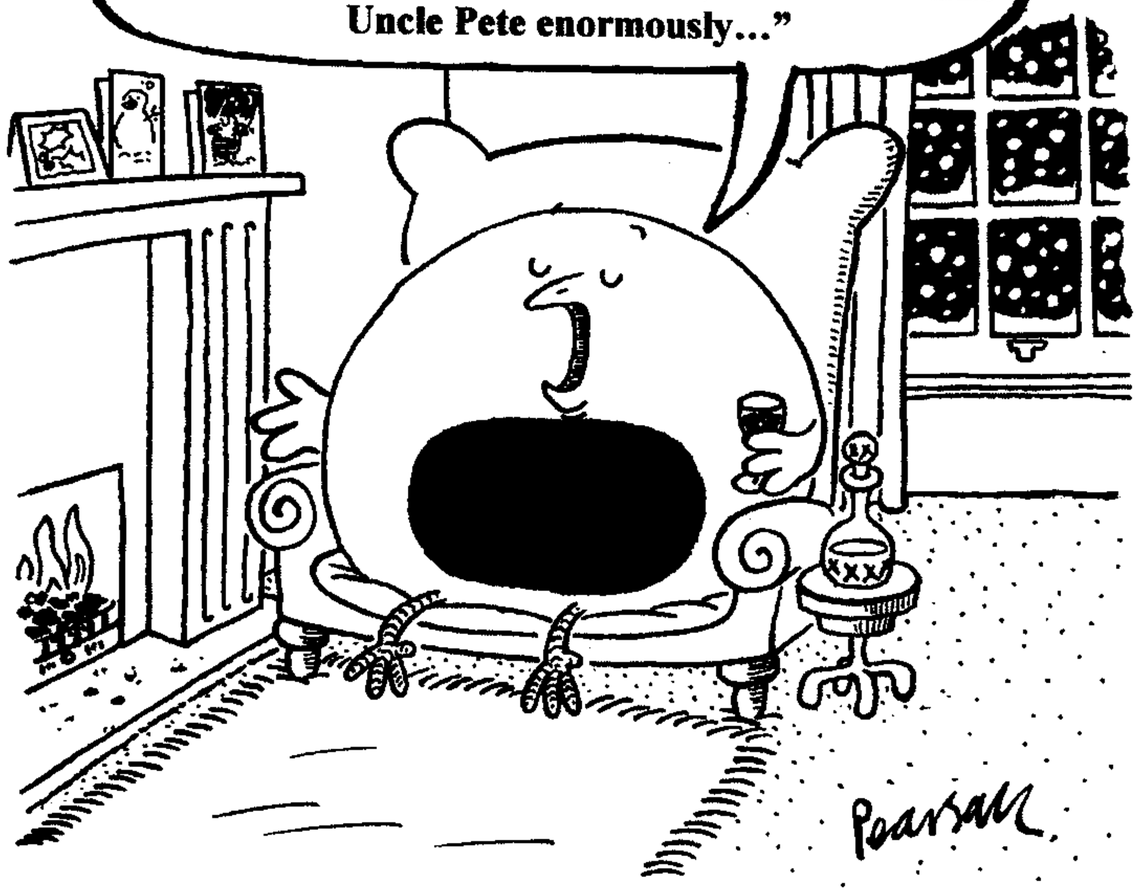
CHERIE BLAIR on GERMAINE GREER

Haven't we all had enough of this screaming, wild-eyed woman ranting on all over the place?

As a feminist, I *(cont'd. p. 94)*

NEW RAIL PLAN

"Well, it's been another hectic year for the Robins!! Shirley and I have barely had time to draw breath! Shirley's book 'Cooking With Worms' is being made into a television programme and my Owl Mobbing business continues to go from strength to strength. The twins, Jocasta and Cumquat, both got Firsts at Oxford and are now enjoying a year out travelling round India. Sebastian has finally given in to his girlfriend's nesting instincts and so he and Wendy have moved in together into a beautiful hedge just outside Kidderminster. Buying two cats this year, however, has been less successful, and we will miss Uncle Pete enormously..."



COURT CIRCULAR

10, DOWNING STREET

Tuesday: HM the Prime Minister and HRH Princess Cherie received the President of Syria and Mrs Assad at a State Banquet. The Princess was attended by the Mistress of the Shower, Ms Carole Crackpot and Dowager Mistress of the Healing Oils, Mrs Sylvie Crackpot. Mr Peter Frodster faxed over apologies for his absence.

Wednesday: HM the Prime Minister and HRH Princess Cherie gave a luncheon in honour of the editor of the Sun newspaper, Sir David Yelland and his wife Lady Leylandii Yelland. Also present was the Master of the Spin, Sir Alastair Campbell of that Lie, attended by his live-in partner Dame Fiona Millbank. They were later joined by HRH Prince Euan who had been on a Royal tour of various local hostelries.

In the evening the Princess Cherie presented the awards at a charitable function, where she made a speech on behalf of Amnesiacs Anonymous.

Thursday: Lord Booth of Scousegit continued his provincial tour, with a visit to the bookselling establishment of Messrs Waterstone in Kingston-on-Hull, where he signed three copies of his memoirs *A Portrait of the Piss Artist As An Old Man.*

HRH the Princess Lauren of Booth graciously contributed yet another article about her sister to the periodical *The New Statesman (That's enough Court Circular. Ed.)*

Advertisement

FOSTER'S SAGA

CHRISTMAS TV

The Conman

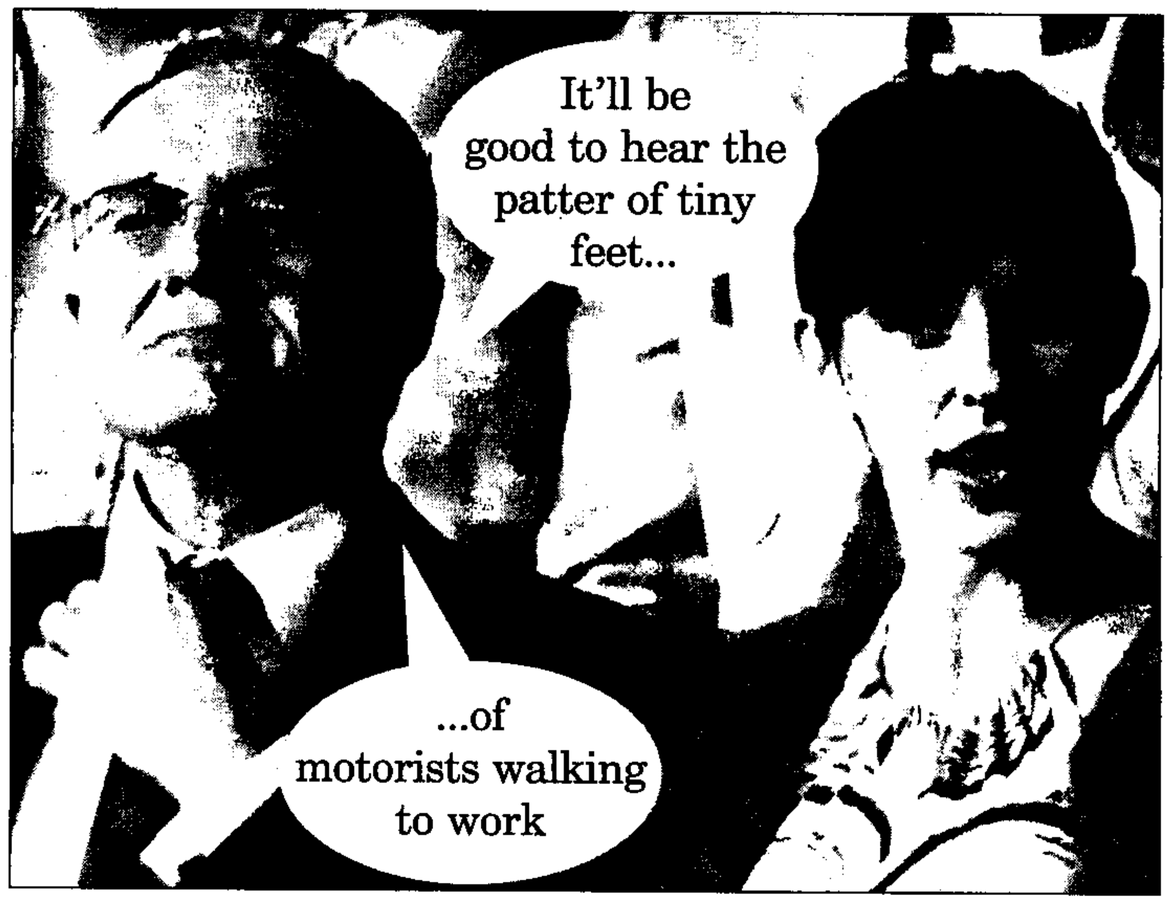
RONNIE BIGGS's immortal and much-loved Christmas classic in which little Cherie looks out of the window and sees the Conman come to life. Before she knows what has happened, he has whisked her off onto the front pages of all the newspapers. But when the Sun comes out (and the Daily Mail as well) the Conman melts away, leaving Cherie in tears. Includes Aled Jones's unforgettable rendition of "We're Taking in The Blairs".

*ALSO

Pyscho II

RE-MAKE of Hitchcock horror-classic complete with even more spine-chilling version of 'that shower scene', when looney Caroline Caplin attacks innocent Cherie Blair with an organic loofah. "The sight of Cherie's toxins dribbling away down the plug-hole remains a cinema classic," says TV's Barry Norman.

'CONGESTION CHARGE' KEN IS PROUD FATHER



Nursery Times

27 December 2002

DUKE CHALLENGED ON WHEREABOUTS OF MEN

BY OUR DEFENCE STAFF SIR HUMPTINGTON DUMPTINGTON

THE grand old Duke of York was last night under pressure to review the exact position of his 10,000 troops, which had earlier been reported to be "on standby" for a forthcoming military operation.

The Duke, however, was deliberately non-committal about future plans for the deployment of his forces.

"The fact that I last week ordered my chaps to march up the hill," he told the Nursery Times, "does not mean that I could not order them to march down the hill at a moment's notice."

Military experts have pointed out that this could well leave his troops "in a half-way situation, ie neither up nor down."

But Mr Hoon denied this, saying that it was not always possible to reveal one's military options, in case the enemy got wind of the fact that we are planning to invade Iraq after Christmas.

ON OTHER PAGES

- DNA Plot To Prove That Prince Used To Be Frog **2**
- *Dick Whittington's Controversial Congestion Charge – Are London's Streets Paved With Money?* **3**
- Your Choo-Choos Tonight **94**

A Pumpkin Driver Writes

Every week a well-known vegetable driver is invited to give his views on an issue of topical interest.

This week: **A Rat** (Pumpkin Driver No. 1724) on **Why We Must Keep Jumblies Out**

'I tell you, guv, we don't need people with green heads coming over here and sponging off the Social Security. I say they should be left to drown in their sieves, if that's what they want. I had that Cinderella in the back of my pumpkin once. A very clever girl.

"Sorry to trouble you but could you recharge my mobile?"

"I quit my job at the carwash, I left my momma a goodbye note. By sundown I'd left Kingston with my guitar under my coat. I hitch-hiked all the way down to Memphis, got a room at the YMCA. For the next three weeks I went haunting them nightclubs, looking for a place to play. Well, I thought my picking would set 'em on fire but nobody wanted to hire a guitar man. So that's when I got a job here, stacking shelves"

POLLY FILLER

Author of the Best-Selling 'Mummy For Old Rope'

CHRISTMAS is always the most magical time of year – falling snow, children skating and the coloured lights twinkling in Macy's window. It's just a shame my family won't be here in New York to celebrate with me. But it wasn't practical, given my hectic schedule of book promotion with interviews, personal appearances and the odd bit of shopping to relax. Of course I feel guilty – don't all working mums walking the tightrope of their careers? But, as ever, I have somehow pulled off the balancing act by hiring an extra au pair for Christmas (delightful Ugandan girl who tells us the average wage there is 20p a day. No wonder she is so thrilled when I pay her 25p!).

So the useless Simon and his two little helpers will have to play Santa this year and do something for once, instead of watching Celebrity Goose-Eating on BBC Digital's No One's Watching Channel, presented by Jeremy Vine.

OVER here in the Big Apple you'll be pleased to know that New York has rolled out the red carpet and embraced me as a daughter. Everyone in the United States has gone Polly Filler mad! From Mexican cab drivers to Korean bellboys, there is only one topic of conversation and that is my best-selling new novel *Mummy For Old Rope*. And the word from Tinseltown is that all of Hollywood's top actresses are queuing up to play me! Jennifer Lopez, Penelope Cruz and Catherine Zeta Jones have all put themselves forward, saying "I am Polly Filler. This is the hilarious but emotional story of my life too. I'll do it for nothing, it's so brilliant."

Unfortunately, they are all too fat and old to quite capture the real me – juggling the roles of mother and best-selling author of *Mummy For Old Rope*.

Also, I am not sure that any of these actresses are up to playing me in the heartrending Christmas climax of the book where the guilt-ridden Polly has to go on a book promotion tour rather than spend vital quality time with her beloved toddler. It's a classic Polly Filler moment when our heroine manages to bring a Christmas smile to her toddler's face when she picture messages a photo of herself having lunch with Steven Spielberg.

In the end, I think there's only one person good enough to play me. And that's myself!

As it says in my best-selling book *Mummy For Old Rope*, Polly Christmas and a Filler New Year!

© Polly Filler

Literary Review

BOOKS OF THE YEAR

CHRISTMAS cards aren't the time for sincerity. Do you truly wish your hairy aunt a merry yule? You don't really love your dipso uncle, do you? Never mind. Sign the thing anyway and send it off.

Books of the Year are exactly the same: quite simply the greetings cards of the literati. So what if they're phoney? There's no professional malfeasance involved. Not being paid to contribute them, all reviewers feel quite free to use them to send messages of seasonal cheer to their friends and bosses, so saving on postage.

Everybody knows the score – except perhaps the poor deluded punters who actually buy the books. For Book of the Year recommendations do generate sales. The weeks before Christmas are crunch time for the book trade and a fawning tribute now is worth 10 rave reviews at any other time of the year.

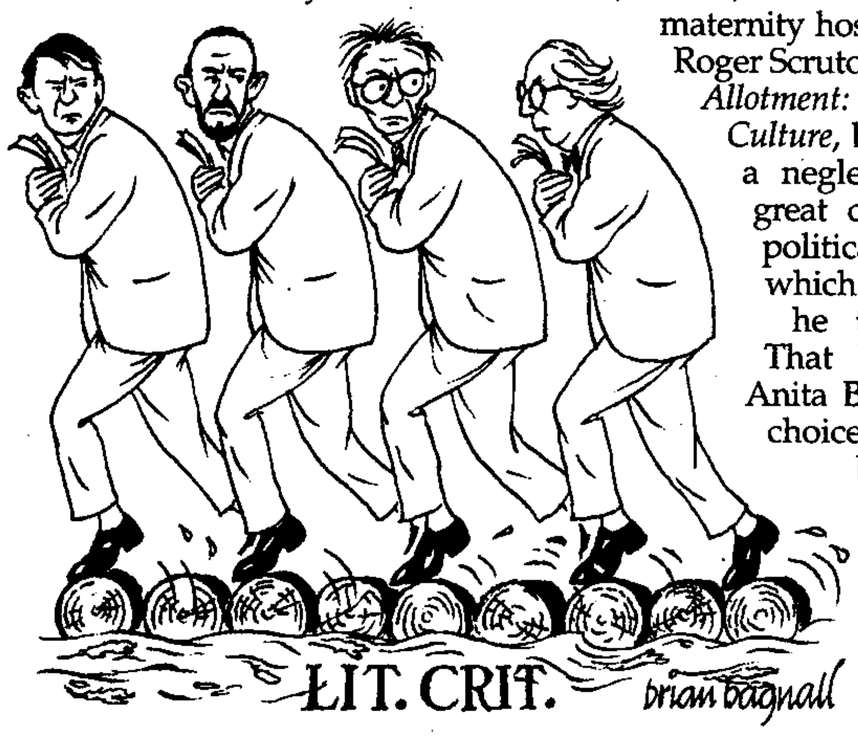
It turns out very nicely for everybody all round. Why, having your pals nominate you isn't just getting a card to put on your mantelpiece. There's also a few crisp twenties stuffed into the envelope into the bargain. Cheers! No wonder everybody's so eager to cooperate.

Only the most juvenile reviewers choose their Books of the Year once. Most pros do it two or three times in different papers, some industriously changing their selections each time, others sticking with their favourties. Every well-known face obliges more than once. John Mortimer, Beryl Bainbridge, Alain de Botton, Lisa Jardine, Melvyn Bragg, Anne Widdecombe, Antonia Fraser, Philip Hensher – they're all repeat offenders. But the king in this arena, year after year, the pro's pro, is J.G. Ballard.

Ballard managed to choose his Books of the Year no fewer than five times: in the *Guardian*, the *Statesman*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Independent* and the *Observer* – a superb performance. He found his friend Iain Sinclair's unreadable *London Orbital* to be "stupendous", "fascinating", "an instant classic" and "vivid". Then again, it isn't often one reads a book that contains several index references to oneself. Messrs Ballard and Sinclair could even be heard in conversation at the ICA on 14 December.

But Ballard is right. These choices all mulch down into a nutritious compost of publicity and nobody really remembers who was responsible for emitting them originally. So, counting multiple entries to be just as valid as any other, who won?

Claire Tomalin's biography of Samuel Pepys scored 15; Jonathan Franzen's masterpiece from last year *The Corrections* 14; Selina Hasting's life of the hapless shagger Rosamond Lehmann 13; Steven Pinker's nature not nurture polemic *The Blank Slate* 12; A.N. Wilson's middlebrow history *The Victorians* 11, alongside John Gray's pretentious rant, *Straw Dogs*.



Coming up with 10 votes each were *Fingersmith*, the Wilkie Collins pastiche by Sarah Waters; *The Child That Books Built*, a brainy memoir by Francis Spufford; and Eric Hobsbawm's failure to admit any guilt about lifelong fellow-travelling, *Interesting Times*.

Close behind came Sebastian Haffner's fine memoir of Nazism, *Defying Hitler*, and Orlando Figes's cultural history of Russia, *Natasha's Dance*. Plenty of other titles took a half dozen or so votes – Donna Tartt's *The Little Friend*, Antony Beevor's *Berlin*, Yann Martel's Booker winner *Life of Pi*, Zadie Smith's *The Autograph Man*, William Trevor's *The Story of Lucy Gault* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything is Illuminated*.

Also mentioned enough times to make then possibly worth investigating were William Dalrymple's *White Mughals*, Michael Frayn's *Spies*, Paul Auster's *The Book of Illusions*. Milan Kundera's *Ignorance*, Michel Houellebecq's *Platform*, John Grigg's *Lloyd George*, Nicola Shulman's *A Rage for Rock Gardening*, Blake Morrison's mum memoir, *Things My Mother Never Told Me*, and Andrei Makine's novella, *A Life's Music*.

Poor Martin Amis: his dreadful book about his father and Stalin, *Koba the Dread*, received massive review coverage in the autumn, but two months later was chosen only once, by his longterm mucker, Karl Miller, in the *TLS*. Poor Will Self: his Wilde-rewrite *Dorian*, rated only two mentions, both by acolytes, Nicholas Lezard and David Flusfeder.

Plenty of reviewers use Books of the Year as yet another means of semi-demented self-projection. In the *Mail*, Val Hennessy chose some ropy book about the Rolling Stones: "One of the book's great revelations (for me, at least) was the news that Mick (scream!) and I were born in the same maternity hospital." In the *Times*, Roger Scruton alighted upon *The Allotment: Its Landscape and Culture*, because it "explores a neglected institution of great cultural, moral and political significance", which is no doubt how he thinks of himself. That bundle of laughs, Anita Brookner, began her choice in the *Spec* by saying simply "Nothing has pleased me much this year" before choosing a French novel called *D'Amour*, "an account of two unrelated deaths by suicide". Cheer up, duck, it may never happen.

Among his many choices, the great traveller Alain de Botton managed to include *Always a Welcome: The Glove Compartment History of the Motorway Service Area* which he declared to be "for all those (like me) who find roadside Happy Eaters unexpectedly poetic". So now you know who to blame if you find that in your stocking. Yet somehow the prize for provoking wonderment must still go to Emma Hagestadt in the *Indie* who reported that Trinny and Susannah's *What Not to Wear* had given her "happy hours spent trying to work out what combination I had of Trinny's 'tits' and Susannah's tummy." Hours, dear? Hours?

As for log-rolling, the real professional turned out to be novelist Claire Messud who chose her most enthusiastic reviewers, Rachel Cusk and Philip Hensher, as, in turn, her authors of the year. Hensher returned the compliment by choosing Messud again.

Hensher also performed the reverse exercise which is lambasting as "over-praised" anything that might seem to compete with one's own darling work. Readers of his *Spectator* choices, which included a lavish encomium to his fast friend A.N. Wilson's *The Victorians*, may have been startled by his spectacular dissing of Michel Faber's highly rated Victorian novel *The Crimson Petal and the White* ("God knows why anyone liked it", etc) Was it really that bad? Perhaps not, but Hensher just happens to have published his own Victorian epic, *The Mulberry Empire*, and these coincidences rankle.

The Duchess of Devonshire superbly named Roy Jenkins's *Churchill* and *Remaking the Landscape* edited by Dame Jennifer Jenkins. Can they just possibly be friends? Canongate author Michel Faber loyally chose fellow-Canongate novelist Yann Martel. D.J. Taylor could be found in the *Spectator* puffing his chum Justin Cartwright's novel *White Lightning* and in the *Independent* admiring his friend Michael Slater's biography of Douglas Jerrold and his old patron former *Sunday Times* literary editor Harry Ritchie's bloke novel *Friday Night Club*.

"The British are not renowned for cultural *grands projets*," Lawrence Norfolk began his *TLS* selection, "but A.S. Byatt has been writing, for more than thirty years, a panoramic cycle of novels covering the intellectual and social life of post-war Britain." It can only be by chance, of course, this young fan is a co-dedicatee of one of Dame Antonia's novels.

Dame Antonia herself turned up in the *Guardian* acclaiming *Lunar Men* by Jenny Uglow who, by chance, is her editor at Chatto & Windus. Sarah Sands of the *Telegraph* chose Allison Pearson's *I Don't Know How She Does It* to confirm her own brilliance in having originally commissioned it as a column. John Mortimer affably selected his Turville neighbour Jeremy Paxman ("intelligent and enlightening") in the *Sunday Telegraph* but in the same paper Paxman rudely failed to choose Mortimer, naming instead books about glass and eels. For shame!

Bel Mooney weirdly selected *Waxworks*, a book of poems by Frieda Hughes, the daughter of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, because, she said, it "hit my skull with hammer blows" (in that case maybe it's a good, not to say public-spirited, book deserving every encouragement).

In the *Telegraph*, Boris Johnson didn't get on with the second most popular book of the year. "Had a go at the big new American thing, called the commitments or the corrections or something, in which a chap takes 50 pages to eat a turnip." Evelyn Waugh said almost exactly the same, in similar words, about Proust. The old jokes, you can't beat them, can you?

Christmas round-ups are also a fine excuse for advertising the sophisticated, expensive and recherché nature of one's tastes. Alarmed by the erratic behaviour of politicians, Johnson claimed to have been consoled by the Loeb edition of Cicero's *Philippics*, while Clive James in the *TLS* found it "disturbing" that the work of Alain Finkielkraut is not translated into English. Apparently "our students of politics and philos-

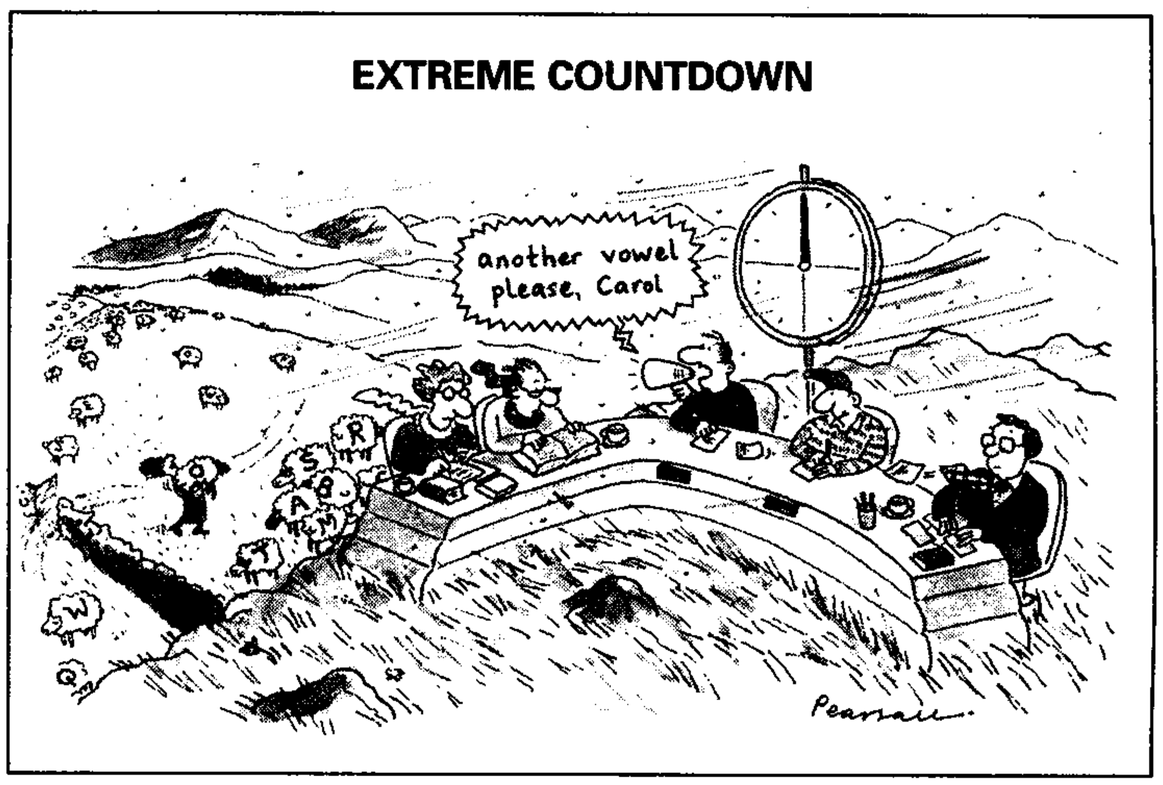
SNIPCOCK & TWEED
WHAT A HIDEOUS JACKET!
SIMPLY GHASTLY! YOU'D BE MAD TO BUY THAT!
... FAR TOO THIN!
..AND TOO FAT!
what not to wear
TRINNY & SUSANNAH
What not to wear
IT'S A MAKEOVER BOOK – IT MAKES OVER £1 MILLION

ophy are starving for the lack of it."

Michel Faber stoutly recommended an "828 page compendium of *The Leisure Hour* magazine for 1862". Michael Foot, meanwhile, urged readers of the *Guardian* not to be put off by the £60 price tag on his choice of Robert Woof's *William Wordsworth: The Critical Heritage Volume One 1793-1820.*

More devious, perhaps, is the spectacle of outwardly incorruptible sages casually puffing books issued by their own publishers. Faber, traditionally a prime beneficiary of this disguised advertising, did notably well this year. Hanif Kureishi managed two puffs, while Tom Paulin in the *Guardian* contrived to cite Paul Muldoon's *Moy Sand and Gravel*, Andrew Motion's *Public Property*, Seamus Heaney's *Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001* and John McGahern's *That They May Face the Rising Sun*, all of which happen to be published by his own sponsors at Queen Square.

Yet the year's highlight was undoubtedly Conrad Black's assault on Max Hastings for his *Telegraph* memoir, *Editor*. "Max had an attention span of 15 seconds, clung dogmatically to a lot of silly opinions, and was constantly manipulated by the Tory Wets", Black scoffed. Then he added: "I always liked him and remember him amically" – a sentence in which the tenses do the dirty work. Here we see the future of Books of the Year choices: as a new form of public execution. More, please.



Future tense

Prey

Michael Crichton

(HarperCollins, £17.99)

THE novels of Michael Crichton – typified by *Jurassic Park* – work by extrapolating a future from scientific clues. He looks at graphs, reads research, talks to experts and spots a trend which he fictionalises.

Jurassic Park expressed the popular fear of cloning in a huge, accessible child-friendly metaphor at a time when most people were still struggling to spell DNA. *Disclosure* anticipated the moral panic over sexual harassment and *Airframe*, in a way which seems ever more spooky, predicted that fear of flying would become our turn-of-the-millennium disease.

But, if Crichton were really honest to his instincts for a trend, his next novel would be called *Pulp*. Its handsome hero – Micky Crackon – would be a best-selling thriller writer who, idly looking at royalty statements one day, suddenly noticed that King, Grisham and the other brandname authors were suddenly selling much less well than they had.

This is bad news for Crackon, who has just taken a $30m advance from Rupert Murdoch. Desperate to find out what's going on, he discovers that a mysterious virus called 9/11 has made people less interested in fiction. It's factual books which are selling.

To be fair, Crichton, in the new novel which he has published instead of that one, does show signs of realising the problem. *Prey* is prefaced by a scholarly introduction, complete with footnotes, in which the writer details his research. Someone flicking through books in a shop might not realise it's a novel at all.

Except that the ensuing narrative is so fanciful. The problem is that Crichton got on to biological warfare – our current hot topic – 30 years too early with *The Andromeda Strain*. So he's now seeking his inspiration in ever more recherché research. His last book *Timeline* was, god help us, about time-travel, which ain't ever going to happen. Now *Prey* raises the possibility that "nano-technology" (the attempt to build man-made machines so small we can't see them) might somehow result in a cloud of poisonous invisible particles which have developed a will of their own.

Crichton might object that we haven't grasped the science. But a thriller isn't a research paper. *Jurassic Park* was a masterpiece of popular entertainment because its pitch was immediately grasped: "What if dinosaurs were cloned?" But the pitch for *Prey* runs something like: "What if the really cutting-edge stuff in nanotechnology, biotechnology and computer technology were somehow combined?"

The basics of the narrative do show this author's usual skill. Jack Forman, sacked from Silicon Valley for whistle-blowing, is now house-husband to his kids, one of whom has a mysterious illness which surely can't be connected with Mrs Forman's job at a new tech company. The wife – a shrill bitch who's probably having an affair – repeats the fear of successful women which disfigured *Disclosure*. But the thing's chugging along nicely until we realise it's all connected with this cloud of tiny particles.

Crichton's greatest error, and a strange one in a man who has worked so often in the movies, is the noun which he chooses to describe the predatory mass: "Swarm". To film fans, this immediately invokes one of the worst cinema creations of all time, in which Michael Caine fought to save an American town from a platoon of killer-bees. So in the middle section of Crichton's novel – in which, every few pages or so, someone laments that "the swarm is coming" – many middle-aged readers are taken straight out of this shining new techno-thriller and dragged back across the decades to a flea-pit where the audience was roaring with laughter even though it wasn't a comedy.

At least that dreadful old disaster movie was an exaggeration of a real human fear: the sting of a bee. Trying to terrify us with an extremely theoretical possibility at a time when readers are nervously sniffing their city air for bio-chemical weapons is Crichton's first dumb move in a long time.

The careers of best sellers can be short. Len Deighton, who used to be as big as Le Carré, is scarcely heard of now. Significantly, in the last two years, John Grisham and David Baldacci have diversified from legal thrillers into family sagas and Christmas yarns.

Crichton dropped out of popularity for long years between *The Andromeda Strain* and *Jurassic Park* and he seems to have lost the way again. The novelist famous for seeing the future must start to think about his own.

Pseuds Corner

Cheap Japanese food is a little like masturbation.

JAY RAYNER
Observer Magazine

Alistair Coombs – "Cosmic Rounds & Aeonic Progression"

Alistair will be examining the archaic genesis and sequential unfoldment of the omniverse from the viewpoint of occult metaphysics, and looking at the theosophical, thelemic and neoplatonic systems concerning this.

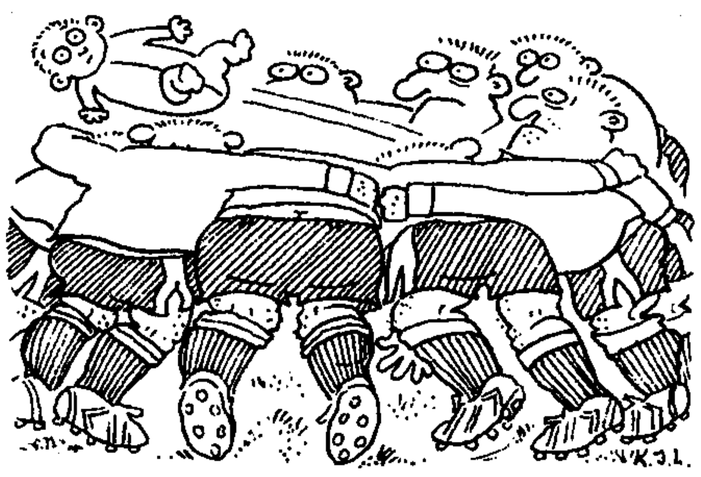
South East London Folklore Society flyer

...the Hamlet of the over-the-top tackle.

TONY PARSONS on Roy Keane
Guardian

The look of the game [rugby union], although it has immeasurably speeded up since I was a boy, remains hypnotic. The phallic echoes as the ball is put into the scrum, and the overtones of childbirth itself as it squirts out, have not been overlooked in the late-night revelry that is an essential part of the game.

GODFREY SMITH
Sunday Times



"I often have crises when I'm getting ready for a party," she confides. "In fact, I have a word for them – 'conflamas'. A conflama is a mixture of conflict and drama," she explains. A stickler for perfection, she will also put on party underwear. "Right now I'm wearing black Victoria's Secret knickers that say 'sexy' in diamante."

New York night-club owner AMY SACCO, quoted in *Vogue*

...nothing has been written about how bowel "regularity" becomes one of the means by which women exercise "control" in their daily lives. In the following pages, I would like to lay some of the groundwork for a project that examines how women manage and attach significance to their bowel habits, or more generally, to the movement of substances through their bodies, even as their bodies are moved through, or positioned within, social, political, domestic, erotic, and ideological systems.

JEAN WALTON
'Female Peristalsis', in *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*

Pseuds Corporate

The Army is currently developing its corporate strategic framework with a principle thrust to ensure its 'frontline' is adequately resourced to meet needs at a local level effectively.

Salvation Army marketing and fundraising head JULIUS WOLFF-INGHAM, quoted in *Precision Marketing*

CONTRIBUTORS: Ian Timpany, Colin Dallibar, E.D.J. Hay, George McNally, Edward Lindsay, Sheena Davitt, Elizabeth Robson Taylor.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

THE REVENUE'S SANTA CLAUSE

LUCKILY for the chairman of the Inland Revenue, Sir Nicholas Montagu, only four publications, including *Private Eye*, turned up on 11 December when he and the chairman of Customs & Excise gave evidence to a sub-committee of the Commons treasury select committee.

The subject was a familiar one to *Eye* readers: the sale of £370m worth of tax and customs offices to a gang of millionaires in a company called Mapeley Steps Ltd, registered – ha, ha – in the tax haven of Bermuda. The main points to emerge from the background documents supplied to the committee and the fuddled replies of Sir Nicholas to questions from David Laws, Liberal Democrat MP for Yeovil, were as follows:

From the first mention of the sale of their buildings in 1998 to the actual sale in 2001, the board of the Inland Revenue did absolutely nothing to ensure against tax avoidance on the deal. Yet the board knew the buyers of the buildings were serial property speculators advised by lawyers and accountants who were experts in tax avoidance. It also knew that treasury ministers were keen to expose and oppose tax avoidance, especially in tax havens.

SIR NICHOLAS: Just three cock-ups

Revenue chiefs found out that their properties were to be sold to a company in Bermuda, a notorious tax haven, shortly before the contract was signed in March 2001. Yet they did nothing to stop the deal or even object to it. They did not even tell the ministers responsible about the proposed tax avoidance in which they were, effectively, conniving.

Then did not calculate the cost of the avoidance to British taxpayers; and did not even ask Mapeley to work on a deal where the company buying the properties was based in the UK and paid tax here.

On every occasion they published the identity of the purchaser – not once, not twice but *three* times – the Inland Revenue and customs deceived parliament and/or the public about the sale of the buildings to a tax haven. They pretended that the purchasing company was registered in the UK. These, said Sir Nicholas, were "minor cock-ups… you can't crawl over, checking and double-checking". That cavalier approach to the facts by the Inland Revenue may come as a surprise to many taxpayers.

When the Mapeley millionaires found out that the cost of running the revenue and customs buildings was higher than expected, they came back begging for a new deal and more money. Quick as a flash, the Inland Revenue provided them with what the treasury accounting office call a "letter of comfort". The message of the letter was, in effect, "if the deal costs you too much, don't worry: we'll make it up to you". This letter of comfort saved Mapeley from insolvency.

On 5 March and again on 18 July, at meetings with the revenue board, the paymaster-general Dawn Primarolo expressed "strong reservations" about the letter of comfort. Yet on 24 July the board sent the letter off without even consulting her.

Sir Nicholas pretended that even if the contract had been signed with a UK company, "there was nothing to stop them moving, perhaps to a regime where there is no tax". This is nonsense. Former Tory chancellor Nigel Lawson's finance act 1988 dealt specifically with companies that move to tax havens. As a result, if Mapeley had moved to a tax haven, the company and its transactions would have been taxable in the UK as if it hadn't moved at all. And even if the properties had been sold to a company in another tax haven, Mapeley would have been liable for capital gains tax on a massive scale.

Sir Nicholas pretended that European Union and World Trade Organisation rules would have prevented the revenue from refusing a contract to a company in a tax haven. If this were true – if such rules really do prevent governments from stopping companies that buy their assets from setting up in a tax haven – that in itself would be a massive scandal. But the documents submitted to the committee prove that the claim about EU and WTO rules was thought up long after the revenue had sold the buildings. The counsel's opinion quoted by Montagu was quite recent. The probable truth is that the claim is just an excuse to explain away the revenue's original decision to sell the properties; and that there was, and is, nothing in the rules to prevent the revenue insisting that its properties should not be sold into a tax haven.

The last *Eye* revealed that the whole squalid deal was originally put to Dave Shaw, the revenue's expert on avoidance, who warned the board to have nothing to do with it. Asked about this by David Laws MP, Sir Nicholas said: "Dave Shaw's advice was to flag up the fact that it (the deal) could give presentational difficulties but that we couldn't stop it going ahead because of that. It was a legitimate and legal arrangement and therefore wouldn't be a legal reason not to go ahead." The following exchange then took place:

Laws: So is it untrue that Mr Shaw's response was that you shouldn't touch it with a bargepole [as reported in the *Eye*]?

Sir Nicholas: I looked up the exchange of emails and he didn't say that.

Laws: Could you send those emails to the committee?

Sir Nicholas: I'm not sure. There may be commercially confidential matters.

Michael Fallon MP (committee chairman): We'd like to see them if possible.

Sir Nicholas: I'll look into it.

Stamp duty. The *Eye* suggested that stamp duty on the deal was avoided. Asked about this, Sir Nicholas, like the treasury, refused to respond; but on the day after the committee met, Mapeley issued a press release confirming that it had paid stamp duty. Pressed further by the *Eye*, Robin Priest, Mapeley's deputy chairman, revealed that the company paid £8.8m stamp duty at the close of the contract.

The fact remains that £370m worth of government properties were sold by the Inland Revenue and Customs to a company in a tax haven. On Mapeley's own admission, the purpose was to avoid tax on any subsequent sale of the buildings. Mapeley bought the properties for £220m, and if it sold them even for what they are now worth, it would avoid capital gains tax on the difference – a huge saving at the expense of British taxpayers. And into the bargain the lucky company is holding out its begging bowl for yet more money from the taxpayer. Sir Nicholas Montagu, whose past triumphs include the privatisation of British Rail, may find himself back at the full treasury select committee before too long.

BHOPAL: ANOTHER POISONOUS RELEASE

DOW Chemicals, a company heavily criticised for the chemical weapons it supplied in the Vietnam war, is in trouble again – this time over the deaths of 20,000 people in India.

On 3 December it issued a press release headed: DOW ADDRESSES BHOPAL OUTRAGE, EXPLAINS POSITION.

The position is that in 1984 a pesticide factory in Bhopal, India, owned by Union Carbide, sprung a leak. Poisonous gases and chemicals killed 5,000 people almost at once and another 15,000 (at least) when the chemicals seeped into the water supply. Union Carbide was later taken over by Dow.

The Dow press release quoted Michael D. Parker, Dow's president, as saying: "We are being portrayed as a heartless giant which doesn't care about the 20,000 lives lost due to Bhopal over the years. But that just isn't true. Many individuals within Dow feel tremendous sorrow about the Bhopal disaster, and many individuals within Dow would like the corporation to admit its responsibility, so that the public can then decide on the best course of action, as is appropriate in any democracy. Unfortunately we have responsibilities to our shareholders and our industry colleagues that make action on Bhopal impossible. And being clear about this has been a very big step".

The release also quoted Dow spokesperson Bob Questra as saying: "We understand the anger and hurt. But Dow does not and cannot acknowledge responsibility. If we did, not only would we be required to expend many billions of dollars on clean-up and compensation – much worse the public could then point to Dow as a precedent in other big cases. 'They took responsibility; why can't you?' Amoco, BP, Shell and Exxon all have ongoing problems that would just get much worse. We are unable to set this precedent for ourselves and the industry, much as we would like to see the issue resolved in a humane and satisfying way."

The *Eye* assumed the press release was a spoof, a heartless satire on the hypocrisy of multinational companies. So we contacted Dow headquarters and asked if the release could possibly be authentic. Back came an immediate and irritated reply to the effect that of course the release was genuine and the company was proud of it.

THAT'S ALL, FOULKS!

NO company has prospered more from Labour's education policies than Nord Anglia and its founder and chairman, top schools privatiser Kevin McNeany.

McNeany's dour salesmen have been visiting schools across the UK offering to take over various functions that would normally be run by the local education authority. These include payroll, personnel and finance – all of which can, they claim, be run at knockdown prices because of Nord Anglia's commitment to Quality, Innovation and Excellence.

Talk like this has won the company 496 contracts in 295 schools in 20 local authority areas. But not everything is going well for Mr McNeany and Nord Anglia. As recently as 1998, for instance, he was singing the praises of two companies in his group, Accountancy Tutors and Foulks Lynch publishing. But in 1999 Nord had to report that it had closed a school in Torquay because it didn't make a profit, and its much-vaunted summer vacation centres were cut from 34 to seven.

Now comes news that Nord Anglia's share price has almost halved, and Accountancy Tutors and Foulks Lynch have both been flogged off for a "nominal consideration". The result is a whopping loss of £20.1m.

MOTHER OF A DECISION

ENFORCING parental responsibility is being taken to ludicrous extremes. Take the sad case of Jenny Brown (not her real name) and her daughter Julie. Mrs Brown was attacked by her troubled daughter – and was then ordered by magistrates to pay the £5 fine imposed on Julie.

What the pair had long needed – ever since Julie's troubles started after she was the victim of a serious sexual assault – was help.

Julie started truanting from school after she was subjected to taunts there. Mrs Brown tried sending her to a local private school and to one on the continent where her father worked – but the child felt she was the one being punished by being sent away.

When Julie returned to the UK her behaviour deteriorated further. Her mother had to seek help from the local education authority, social services and the police as their relationship broke down and the child started running away from home. Mrs Brown says little help was forthcoming until her daughter started breaking the law and refusing any form of education.

A year ago Julie lost control and attacked her mother, pulling out a large chunk of her hair and prompting her older sister to call the police. For that assault and various other breaches of her "youth action plan", Isle of Wight magistrates sentenced Mrs Brown's daughter to an electronic tag – designed to keep her on home curfew.

Throughout Mrs Brown cooperated with the various agencies, effectively becoming Julie's jailer, bail officer and formal guardian. She informed on her daughter whenever the child broke the conditions of her bail and curfew, just as she had promised the court she would.

Last month Julie went back to court for yet another breach: she had removed her tag and run away. As ever her mother accompanied her to court, hoping magistrates might impose a penalty that would oblige her daughter to attend a specialist day centre that would address her daughter's difficulties and distress.

Instead the court imposed a £5 fine that Mrs Brown, the victim of the original offence, was ordered to pay. Mrs Brown appealed against the ludicrous penalty, saying it achieved nothing. But while Judge Tom MacKean said he had some sympathy with the family's plight, he refused to overturn the fine, saying that to do so would send out the wrong message.

Mrs Brown is at a loss. "If fining me was meant as a punishment for Julie, it was not. If fining me was meant to help Julie, it did not."

FLORIDA SUM

WHAT better way to inspire health chiefs who are attempting to turn round the ailing NHS than by sending them to an international conference to learn about "quality improvement in health care"?

So inspiring was the prospect of spending a few days in the Florida sun at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin hotels that no fewer than 64 members of the NHS Modernisation Agency signed up for the December "Move… Moving… Movement" conference.

That was until agency director David Fillingham realised he couldn't justify such an expensive junket – around £100,000 – at taxpayers' expense. He lopped 44 names from the list of those who had been hoping to attend for "professional development" or "special interest". That left 17 who had been invited to speak or lead workshops and three others, Fillingham himself having dropped out already "due to other commitments".

Unfortunately travel and accommodation had already been booked and paid for; and late cancellation meant Britain's cash-strapped NHS couldn't recover all the money. The agency told the *Eye* that cancellation cost about £25,000 and the cost for staff who did attend was under £8,000 because the conference organiser, the US Institute for Healthcare Improvement, a non-profit organisation, paid for the speakers' travel and accommodation.

The agency said the IHI is a recognised international centre of excellence and its annual conference is the leading forum for discussing ideas on improving healthcare. It has bought IHI expertise in cancer and coronary care and is now, with Sweden and the Netherlands, piloting IHI plans for improving healthcare across the board in four NHS areas.

This year's Orlando conference, said the agency, had attracted 3,800 delegates, about 500 of whom were from outside the US. No doubt IHI president Donald Berwick's call to be part of "momentum: velocity times mass. Mass in motion" was a big draw, as were the appearances of renowned health gurus, er, Benjamin Zander, conductor of the Boston Philharmonic, and feminist writer Gloria Steinem.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **PROACTIVE SPORTS:** The fact that *Private Eye* is being sued by Proactive Sports, a Chester agency, was reported in the *Independent* in a manner not entirely favourable to the *Eye*. But the article, by Warrington sports writer Alan Nixon, did not disclose that Mr Nixon has 20,000 shares in Proactive.

When the *Eye* raised this with Mr Nixon, and asked if he thought it appropriate that he should write about a company in which he has such a substantial stake, he said he had "no problem with that". He agreed he had written often about Paul Stretford, chief executive of Proactive Sports Management (a 1,752-word panegyric in the *Independent* on 24 April 2000 is a classic of its kind), and complained that his shares were not bringing in much of a return. He then embarked on a long lecture to the *Eye* on journalistic ethics, complaining that the original *Eye* article was obviously written on the basis of information from a rival agent and warning the *Eye* of the dangers of such sources.

Jermaine Jenas: £5m

Meanwhile there is more news on Proactive itself. In the last issue we referred to the agency's most famous client, Manchester City goalkeeper Peter Schmeichel. Mr Schmeichel's goalkeeper son Kasper has just signed for Manchester City, a fact that is recorded on Proactive's website. Nothing wrong there, because as Proactive's chief executive Paul Stretford once remarked on television: "Nepotism is not a crime."

This point was reinforced on BBC Radio Five Live's investigative sports programme *On the Line* last May. It revealed that Mr Stretford's company employs Jamie, son of the Nottingham Forest manager Paul Hart, and Kenny, son of Newcastle United chairman Freddy Shepherd. Proactive also represented Jermaine Jenas, the bright young mid-fielder, when he was transferred for £5m from Nottingham Forest to Newcastle United. To complete the picture, Sir Bobby Robson, Newcastle's veteran manager, has 100,000 shares in Proactive Sports.

There's nothing specially new or surprising in the revelation that sons of football mangers often work for leading football agents. Jason Ferguson, son of Sir Alex (Man Utd) works for the Elite Sports Group in Manchester, which was involved in the transfer of former United defender Jaap Stam to Lazio; Craig Allardyce, son of Sam (Bolton Wanderers), works for Sports Player Management in Kent; Matthew Francis, son of Trevor (Crystal Palace), works for the First Artist Corporation of Wembley; and solicitor Darren Dein, son of David (Arsenal), is a consultant on legal and commercial matters (though not on transfers) to Jerome Anderson Sports Entertainment and Media.

■ **SPECIAL SCHOOLS:** Swansea council is still not facing up to the claims that one of its special schools operated an illegal "do not rescuscitate" policy on terminally ill children. Last month, instead of answering the serious allegations and claims of a cover-up in a documentary about the activities at the Ysgol Crug Glas school, the authority spent thousands of pounds in a failed high court bid to ban the programme.

Eye readers will recall how nurse Bunny Pinnington lost her job after she blew the whistle on orders from the non-medically qualified head of the Ysgol Crug Glas not to resuscitate or to fatally delay resuscitation on one of her pupils, Anna Davies. After Mrs Pinnington alerted Anna's family to the instructions she was sacked for breach of confidence. She is currently taking Swansea to an industrial tribunal for unfair dismissal.

The council argued that because the tribunal was still live, the documentary amounted to a contempt. But the high court ruled that the programme was about resuscitation at the school and claims of a cover-up – rather than being about the tribunal, which is restricted to looking at whether Mrs Pinnington was unlawfully sacked. Her tribunal resumes in February.

■ **BLANTYRE HOUSE:** The prison service is being forced to defend in the high court its misguided raid on one of the country's best performing prisons and its shoddy treatment of the jail's former governor, Ioin McLellan-Murray.

McLellan-Murray, who was abruptly removed from his job shortly before the unprecedented police raid on Blantyre House, is seeking a judicial review of the home office investigation into his complaints about the affair.

He claims the investigation into his complaints of bullying by Tom Murtagh, the area manager who ordered the raid, and a failure of the prison service in its duty of care towards him, was biased, superficial, unfair, flawed by delay and a breach of natural justice.

The move came as the board of visitors – always supportive of McLellan-Murray – recorded its concern about the way the investigation was conducted and its fears that the "excellent relationship" that had been built up between the jail near Cranbrook, in Kent, and the community should not be jeopardised by a reduction in community work and activities. It was also concerned about the reduction in education programmes since McLellan-Murray's departure.

The high court heard that the "independent" investigation was initially conducted by Clare Pelham, who as director of corporate affairs for the prison service was directly answerable to its boss, Martin Narey – ultimately responsible for what happened to McLellan-Murray. She had no training for such an inquiry and there was delay while she was taught to conduct such an investigations. The inquiry was later taken over by Deborah Loudon, who as director of personnel at the home office sat alongside Mr Narey on the home office management committee.

McLellan-Murray claims, among other things, that the delay was unacceptable, that not all key witnesses were questioned or evidence gathered; that full notes were not taken; that, in an unfair twist, allegations against him made by Murtagh were kept secret and he was given no chance to respond. He says that as a result his career and reputation have been damaged. Colleagues have been promoted while he remains a deputy governor at another jail. He hopes that if the case receives a full hearing in the new year, the high court will order a new investigation, independent of the prison service.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

ALTHOUGH the trading future for MG Rover may be questionable, the directors who masterminded the car maker's takeover from BMW for a nominal £10 in 2000 are already enjoying benefits from the deal despite the group's continued heavy losses.

Phoenix Venture Holdings, parent of the MG Rover group, made a first year loss of £95m to December 2001. The MG Rover car-making subsidiary lost a staggering £227m for the same period. Breakeven is not now predicted until next year, but that was before the problems created by the apparent collapse of the vital joint partnership deal with the China Brilliance Industrial Holdings after its head honcho was embroiled in one of China's endless corruption scandals.

However, the four men behind the Phoenix takeover – John Towers, Peter Beale, John Edwards and Nicholas Stephenson – together with chief executive Kevin Howe are not having to wait, like the other MG Rover shareholders (mostly employees) for the deal to pay off. They are already showing a good return on their investment. Directors' salaries for the period May 2000 to December 2001 totalled £6.2m with the highest paid director, probably Howe or Towers, receiving £1.4m.

Then there is the interest paid on the £10m of loan notes plus 24m Phoenix shares issued as part of the deal whereby Phoenix acquired MG Rover from the Towers-led syndicate. These notes are due to be repaid in 2005 and come with a bank guarantee. Interest paid to the four note holders during 2001 totalled £655,000.

Finally there are the transactions between the MG Rover group and companies linked to certain of the directors.

MG Rover does substantial business with Edwards of Stratford, a car dealership of which Messrs Edwards and Beale are directors and which operates from a property owned by the group to whom it pays rent. Sales to the dealership totalled almost £6m while purchases from it were over £800,000. The directors' dealership also received a loan from the debt burdened MG Rover of more than £820,000 at a generous 1% over base rate.

Lola Cars International – where Nick Stephenson was a director – was paid more than £9m by MG Rover for product development work during 2001. The previous year the figure was £2.3m. The group also bought more than £1.5m in consultancy services from another Stephenson company, Mira, which had been previously paid £234,000.

The Phoenix Four plus Howe are also shareholders in MGR Capital which acquired the leases on 58,000 Rovers previously financed by BMW. That £340m deal done last year was financed by HBOS as a joint venture. This purchase was designed to prevent thousands of unwanted Rovers being dumped on the secondhand car market as the leases ended over the next two years thereby wrecking the sales prospects for new Rovers. These used cars are instead bought either by MG Rover or its dealers. For 2001 the group paid £2m for used Rovers to MGR Capital which has yet to produce any accounts.

The ticking time bomb of these Rover leases is one reason for those who question the ability of Phoenix to keep on rising even with the aid of BMW which was so eager to be rid of Rover that it has loaned the new owners £427m interest free until 2049! The final tranche of that loan was handed over last May. Now Phoenix is on its own. But even if it all ends in tears, John Towers and friends have already made a remarkable return on that £10.

SUGGESTIONS from the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed that he is able to rely on funding from his oil and mining activities around the globe – a claim first made to the *Financial Times* last June – are rejected by those with knowledge of these somewhat limited operations which have to date tended to burn money rather than generate it.

Libya, where Fayed trumpeted a deal with Colonel Gadaffi two years ago after meeting the Libyan leader in his tent, is said to be a closed book. No real deal was ever concluded despite typical Fayed hospitality to Libyan officials when visiting London. Sadly for the pharaoh he was less successful in impressing those to whom Gadaffi delegated the negotiations.

Failure also followed a trip to neighbouring Chad where Fayed was also seeking an oil deal.

In Thailand, despite spending at least $40m, Fayed has yet to make any meaningful oil discoveries offshore – there is a small gas find – and faces further exploration costs. Hospitality to members of the royal family and influential officials has not proved sufficient. Earlier this year Fayed started looking for the exit. But a bid to cut a deal with American giant Chevron is said to have produced an offer of just $1 plus a slice of future royalties.

Nor has mining proved any more successful. RTZ is understood to have paid to take over a small concession in Peru. Mongolia has so far failed to produce anything other than bills. All of which leaves Harrods as the only source of cash to fund Fulham and the Fayed lifestyle.

WICKES is not the only expensive failure the Serious Farce Office had in 2002. It also quietly abandoned a four-year investigation into computer software fraud with Hampshire police codenamed Operation Chaucer.

The case was dropped against three defendants at Portsmouth crown court accused of selling counterfeit software for a variety of legal reasons including the age of the offences and the problem of proving criminality. However, it seems a pity these questions weren't asked until a very long way down the road. Ammunition for those in Scotland Yard and elsewhere who say the SFO's investigations are too unfocused. A matter the new director will perhaps address next year.

FADIL Akgunduz, the Turkish company promoter accused of a largescale investment fraud who has surfaced in the transfer dealings of Aston Villa, is no stranger to Asil Nadir, the fugitive Polly Peck founder. Akgunduz is said to have been involved in the £5.6m transfer of Turkish international Alpay Ozalan from a soccer club he owned in 2000.

At that time Akgunduz's "chain of happiness" pyramid operation called Jet-Pa was running into trouble with up to 20,000 Turkish investors in Germany who had handed over millions in return for promises of a 20 percent return as part of what appears to have been a circular money fraud. The authorities in both Germany and Turkey have begun criminal investigations while Akgunduz has denied fraud and promised repayment. Jet-Pa was similar to the notorious Titan scam closed down by the British authorities.

Nadir, who was at that time based in Istanbul, is said to have had a number of discussions with Akgunduz about possible collaboration. Indeed Nadir is said to have planned a similar investment swindle. On at least one occasion Nadir is understood to have arranged the transportation by air of several million dollars in cash from Istanbul to Northern Cyprus where the money could be laundered in his local bank and then transferred abroad.

Akgunduz initially fled Turkey and became a fugitive but is now a Turkish MP and so has immunity from prosecution. Nadir was forced to leave Istanbul after the money ran out and he was pursued by Turkish creditors. He is now forced to remain in the Turkish-Cypriot enclave of Northern Cyprus and ponder what the impact of any settlement of the Cyprus question will have on his future. Should his protector Rauf Denktash, the long-time Turkish Cypriot leader, be sidelined by the new pro-Europe government in Ankara, the way could be opened for a successful extradition request from Britain. But that assumes that after almost 10 years the SFO would want to try him

THE DIRECTORS

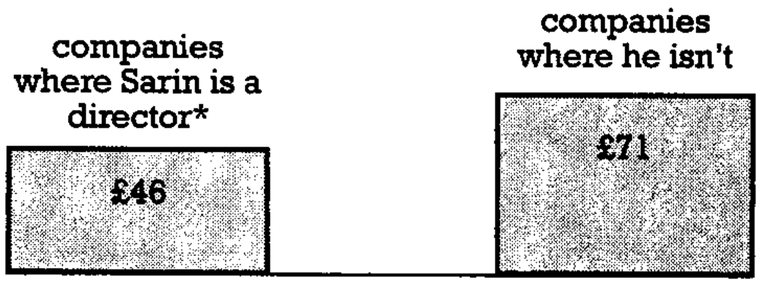
DREDGE & RIGG

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Vodafone's new chief executive, Arun Sarin

Value of £100 invested two years ago in...



*Cisco, Gap, Charles Schwab, and Vodafone

over complex offences which happened mostly before 1990.

THE alacrity with which the British authorities arrested Chechen leader Akhmed Zakayev at the request of the Russians suggests that President Vladimir Putin is getting at last some reward for his support against Saddam Hussein. This is the first time Britain has acted on a Russian extradition request and follows a new agreement reached last year.

However, this may not yet mean that a more famous and high-profile London resident wanted in Moscow, billionaire Boris Berezovsky, should be overly concerned. The problem in the past has always been the Russians' failure to produce the quality of evidence required by a British court to ensure extradition. That test has yet to be passed with Zakayev. Whether it will be met with Berezovsky also remains to be seen. And he has much more money than Vanessa Redgrave to fund a legal battle. But the Zakayev arrest shows that – as after 11 September when Berezovsky and fellow former oligarch Vladimir Guzinsky were advised to stay out of Britain – when Tony Blair wants to keep Putin sweet he is prepared to take action for political if not legal reasons.

THE home office decision to appoint the chief executive of a small local council to head the new Assets Recovery Agency (ARA) has caused considerable disappointment in law enforcement circles.

Jane Earl would have had little experience of either major league criminals or asset recovery while running Wokingham unitary council in Berkshire. The shortlist of candidates is said to have included only one with police experience. Suggestions that political correctness might have weighed more heavily than experience of fighting crime would no doubt be rejected as unfair by "new" Labour.

Yet the ARA is supposed to be a cutting edge agency required to get serious in seizing criminal cash. It was announced more than two years ago with ambitious claims to dismantle the financial structures of organised crime. So a local government bureaucrat seems an unlikely choice as a crime fighter.

Unlike in Ireland, never mind the United States, prosecutors here have had a poor record in recovering the proceeds of major crime. The ARA is supposed to end all that when it opens next year aiming to double the amount seized in two years to £60m. However, it first has to find the assets and then persuade the courts that they should be seized.

Judges have proved hard to persuade in the past without overwhelming evidence, although the new legislation is supposed to make matters easier by reversing the onus of proof. The fiasco of the abortive bid to make timeshare king John Palmer pay £33m – rejected by the court of appeal in August – shows the problems.

Doubtless the army of lawyers, accountants and investigators to be hired by the ARA will have every confidence that their leader is an ideal choice to reverse that trend and take on criminal kingpins.

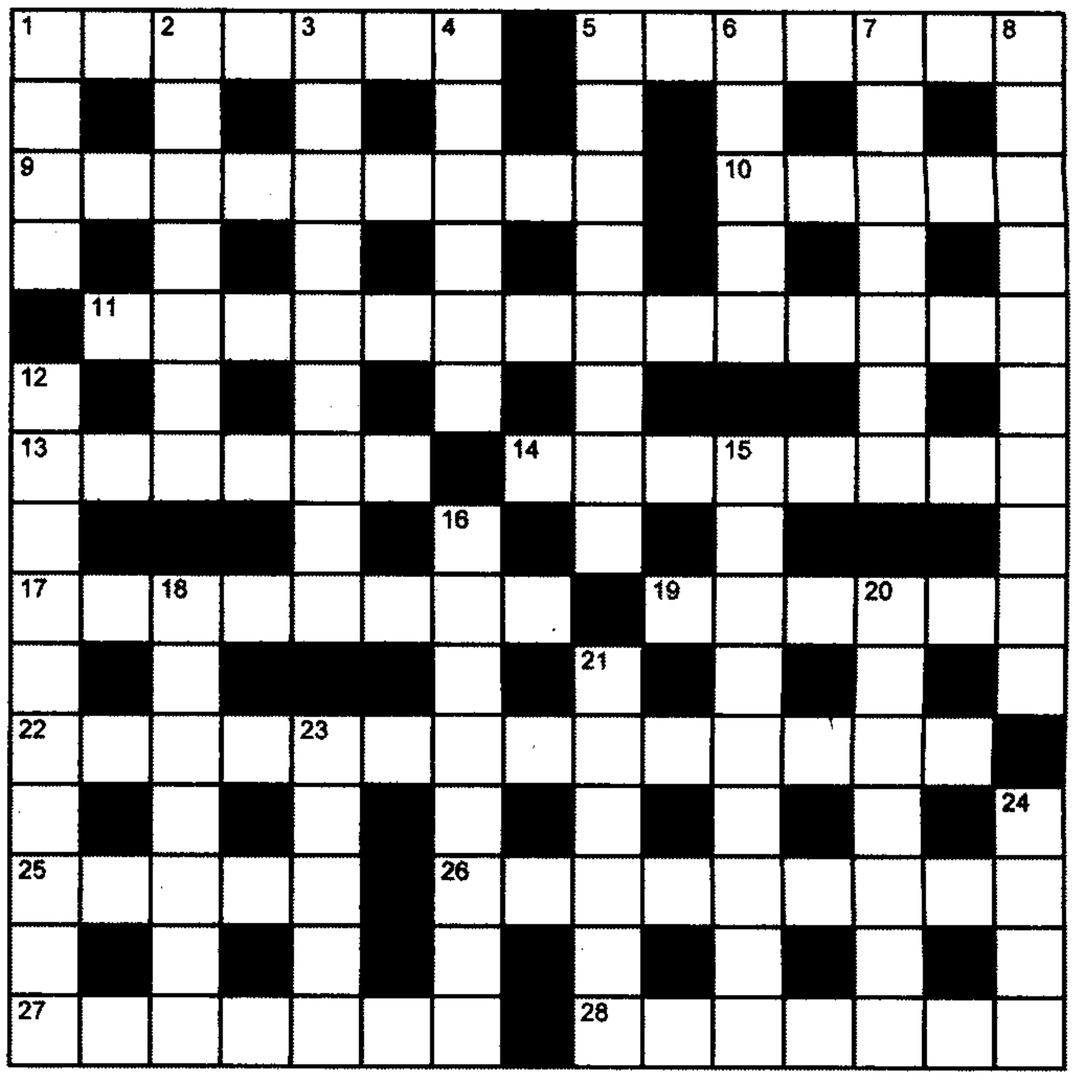
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 225

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 3 January 2003.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Edwina Currie's heart flipped attending her lover's warm spot (7)

5 Get someone to come – Kwan possibly (4,3)

9/11 Screened Marxist denial of the existence of a benevolent distributor at the present time (5,4,2,6,6)

10 One month to abandon image, Tony, and make some progress (3,2)

11 See 9

13 Birds beat breasts, going topless (6)

14 About Rev. Blair's capital cash dispenser: one inside's reported with no change (8)

17 Sexual indifference doesn't originate with the quality of an erection (8)

19 One very contorted bra's pressure line (6)

22 Noel, heading Oasis's first invasion of Lewis, waits to perform it? (9,5)

25 Seoul: trashy housing outside (5)

26 Great White Hope of those in desperate need of cash? (4,5)

27 Guys ring 500 50050 for pussy (7)

28 Bureau wants head to be PC (7)

DOWN

1 Couple of mediocre Advanced Technology education heads (4)

2 Some poor bastard always getting lumbered with Stalin's pensioner (3,4)

3 Erect and aroused with ecstasy, swallowed and reproduced (2-7)

4 Corrosive egos splitting rock group (6)

5 Sounds just the magazine for the bathroom DIY type and demanding peasant (3,5)

6 Chap in Barking getting leg over (5)

7 Relying on another's word about dollar off surgical appliance model (2,5)

8 Touch up Thatcher? That's a personal smear (6-4)

12 Computing the result of coming without new blasted computers (5,5)

15 No. 10 possibly before sexual moves seen as a must for many mobile oldies (3,6)

16 Speed-shag on southern trips (8)

18 Went in for spin – terrible tragedy (7)

20 Screwing any love but Blithe (7)

21 Alleged assassin himself assassinated fascist leader (6)

23 Sylvester lacks one single pissing place (5)

24 Botha's overturned by Bob (4)

Crossword 224 winner: CLIVE BRIGHTLEY

ACROSS: 1/9 Pissing one's pants 5 Postbag 10 Bugle 11 Kaput 12 At the helm 13 Regina 15 Soft porn 18 Bogey-man 19 Muffin 22 Malignant 24 Harem 26 Orbit 27 Stimulate 28 Fixated 29 St Kitts.

DOWN: 1 Plonker 2 Sheep 3 Impotency 4 Gunman 5 Position 6 Sabre 7 Bugger off 8 Grey men 14 Goggle-box 16 Tough luck 17 Rat-arsed 18 Bump off 20 Numbers 21 Ethics 23 Got at 25 Roast.

Exclusive extracts from the highly praised Christmas bestseller *'12 Tube Stations'*

ROY JENKINS

HAINAULT

Hainault is, one might almost suggest, the most oxymoronic of tube stations, being on the Central Line, but very far from central. East of Woodford, yet due south of Grange Hill, it is not a station with which I would claim an instinctive and intimate relationship, rather one which I would say has always greeted me most warmly, offering to carry my bag, whilst stopping short, as it were, of asking me in for a bottle of halfway-decent claret, accompanied by a modest yet inarguably varied selection of choice olives.

I have, I confess, visited Hainault barely once in 80 years. In fact, to be brutally frank, I have never found cause to visit it at all, preferring, when I have the time, to travel by what the French rejoice in calling the "limousine". But I am most reliably informed that many far from disagreeable people avail themselves of the Hainault stop on a daily basis, and I have little doubt the pleasures it affords them are not only paradoxical but also highly convivial.

TOTTERIDGE AND WHETSTONE

I first saw Totteridge and Whetstone when I was, I fancy, but fifteen years of age. I cannot claim, in all honesty, ever to have been back. He would be a saint who could place it among the first rank of London underground stations, and I am make no claim to sanctity, though over the years I have enjoyed close, though seldom intimate, acquaintance with no fewer than six Popes and seventeen Cardinals. I was never a Cardinal myself, though I cannot claim this omission causes me a very great deal of regret. In the late 1950s, I was for a short while Archbishop of Verona, but, for all its splendid sartorial opportunities, I found the post in the main tiresome, and communication with the Lord Almighty for the most part haphazard and tiresomely one-way.

Nevertheless, Totteridge and Whetstone has remained vivid in my mind. I make no claim for it as a rival to, say, the sheer magnificence of Place Vendome in Paris, or, for that matter, the extravagant Neo-Gothic of the Plaza de Colon in Madrid. It is set, a trifle clumsily, in surroundings that are not, one must confess, greatly conducive to the pleasures of the table or, indeed, the amenities of social intercourse. Neither High Barnet, its more northerly neighbour, on the far from undistinguished Northern line, nor Woodside Park, its somewhat less trumpeted southerly companion, offer overwhelming reasons for stopping. But Totteridge and Whetstone has always possessed for me a certain creaky charm, albeit a charm sadly insufficient to draw one back more than once every sixty years.

WARREN STREET

It was in the warm glow of an afternoon in late September that I first set eyes on Warren Street underground station. It is not, perhaps, a first-rate station, still less a second-rate station, but as the lower third-rate stations go, I have always considered it ranks really rather high, if not at the very top, then quite near the upper-middle.

It was during my time, not entirely wasted, as Minister for Transport that I found myself passing through Warren Street. The train itself was less luxurious than utilitarian. In terms of comfort it could never, I think, compare with the Orient Express or, for scenery, with the Trans-Siberian Express, both of them very considerable trains. But it possessed features rarely found in some of the more ostentatiously feted vehicles, as I pointed out to Giscard d'Estaing and Pierre Trudeau, who were journeying with me at the time.

"That's a really rather charming cushion over there," I remarked to Pierre, pointing to a soft yellow item on the banquette opposite. "If not exactly a first rate cushion, then certainly high among the lower seconds." At this point, Pierre, a man with an adventurous, if not perhaps always sagacious, turn of mind, stood up and walked over to the cushion in question. "This is, I fear, no cushion," he said, sniffing it with the instinctive delicacy of a French-born Canadian. "It is a pool of vomit."

Up to that point, I had never, I confess, come across quite such a pool of vomit on the banquette of a major underground railway train. For this reason, I was drawn to study it more closely. Rather to my regret, I found it somewhat less impressive, both in hue and texture, than a pool of vomit most memorably produced by George Brown outside the Savoy Hotel in the cold winter of '66 after a lengthy repast during which he, as Foreign Secretary, had been attempting to steer us through delicate trade negotiations with the Eastern Bloc.

WEST KENSINGTON

West Kensington is one of the most rewarding, if under-appreciated, tube stations on the entire District Line (with the notable exception of Turnham Green, which rivals it in sophistication and, to my mind, surpasses it in *comfort cossu*).

I first visited West Kensington in the spring of 1983. I was, by that time, both General Secretary of the World Trade Federation and Chairman of the World Bank, as well as President of the European Commission, three posts which, I am happy to relate, left one ample time to get on with more useful and more pleasurable, if not necessarily more remunerative, pastimes.

It was not my wish to embarrass the far from disagreeable staff of the District Line by landing on them "out of the blue", as it were. They would not, I surmised, be used to dealing with a man not unblessed with my undoubted lack of indistinction, so with due forethought I had a message posted in advance that the President of the European Commission, etcetera, etcetera, would be arriving at such-and-such an hour on such-and-such a day, giving them plenty of time to lay out the red carpet and so forth.

As I remember it, I had just stepped onto the "down" escalator when the red carpet they had earlier laid upon it began to "ruck up' at the bottom, causing myself and my honoured guests – who included the Lord Provost of Glasgow, Sir Isaiah Berlin, The Duke of Westminster and Dame Anna Neagle – to hurtle head-over-heels down forty-odd steps or more. An unfortunate occurrence, perhaps, but what it lacked in dignity it more than made up for in exhilaration, so we immediately climbed the stairs and did it all over again.

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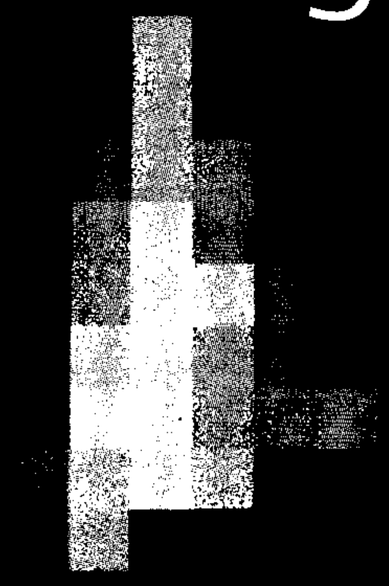

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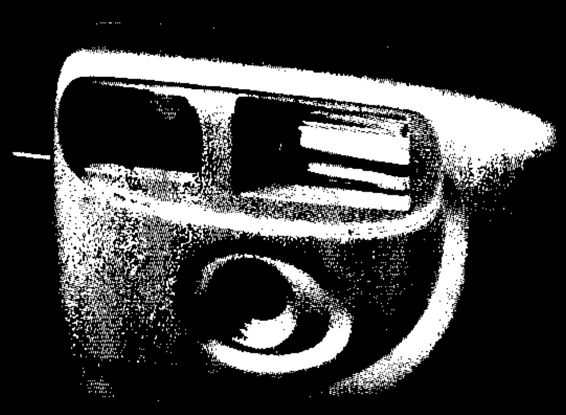

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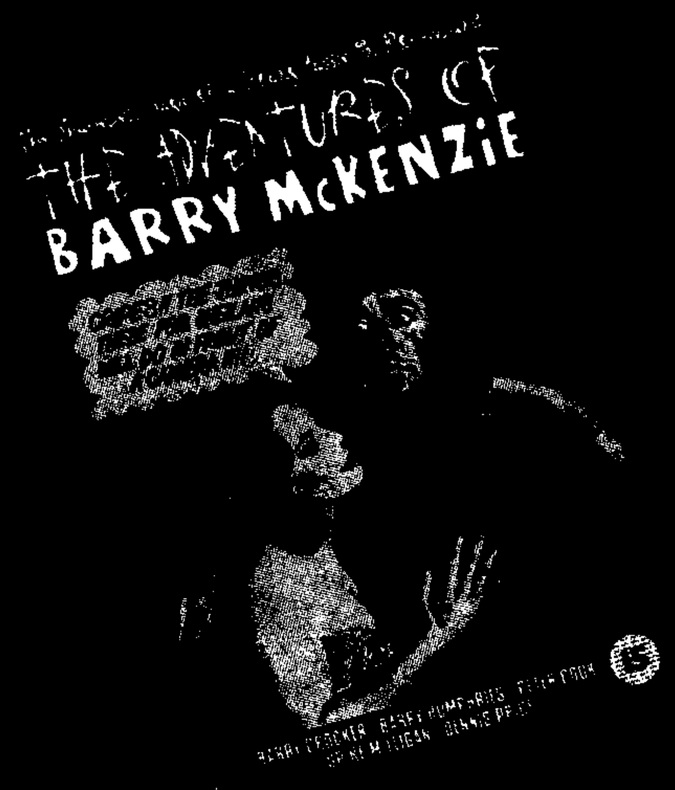

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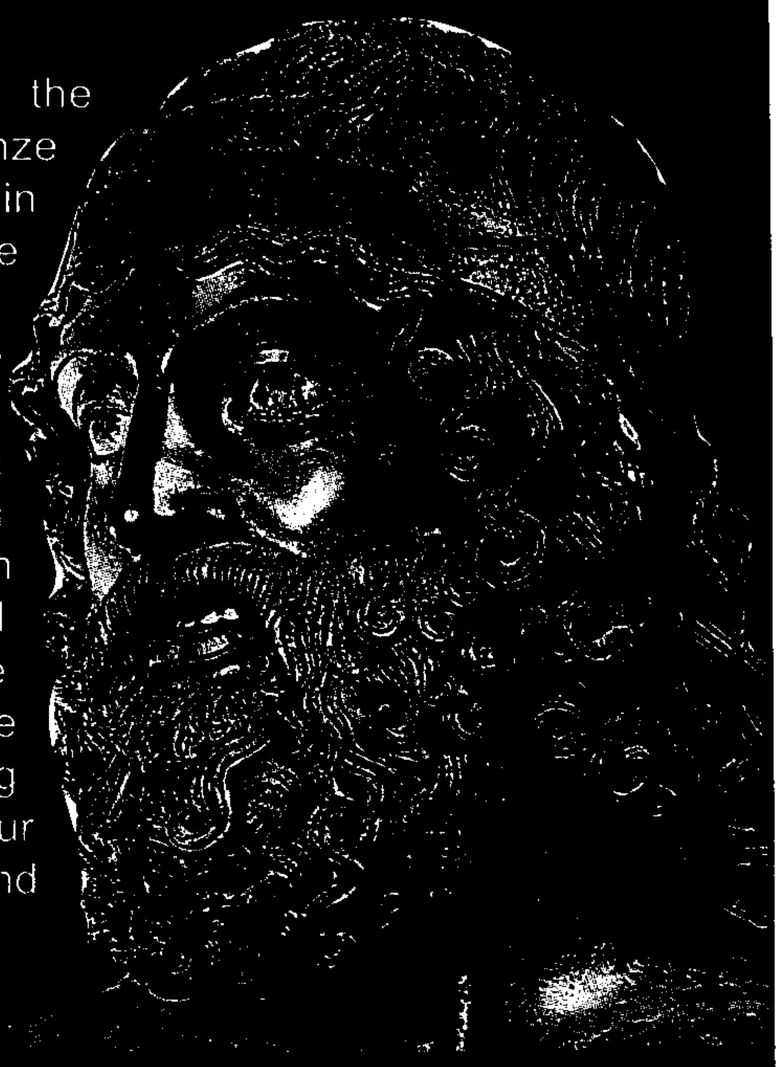

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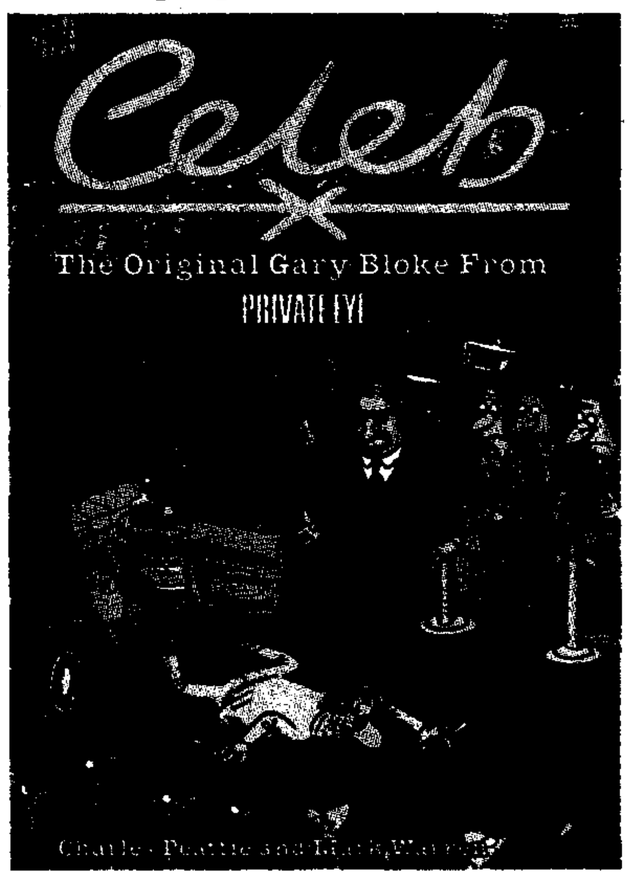

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PRETTY, SLIM LADY, 40 likes quiet holidays and warm friendships, needs help with school fees! E-mail: jillydarling@hotmail.com

LIFE RANSACKED – hate begging. Ex RN £19000 debts. Anything considered. www.debtsos.fsnet.co.uk – Lloyds TSB 77-26-08, 17593760.

SEEKING GOD SEND – desperately struggling. Help please. Lloyds/TSB 77-91-12, 11332168.

HATE NUCLEAR WEAPONS? Anti-nuclear protester needs £5k a year to campaign full time. Everyone replied to Box 0570.

GAVE UP WORK to look after both parents with Alzheimers. Now need funds to get back on feet. Will repay but need time. Lloyds 87-34-52, A/c 75287060. Box 0170.

DIAGNOSED CLINICALLY DEPRESSED Please help: FirstDirect 40-47-81 30126535 Thank You.

HISTORICAL RESEARCHER needs £2400 to prevent repossession; seeks donations/secured loan. Contact: eyehomeappeal@hotmail.com

CREW, BOAT AND FUNDS sought to follow Papillon's escape. Contact richarddollamore@yahoo.co.uk

L'HOMME MEURT et il n'est pas heureux. MONEY needed to opt out or burn out. 40-05-30, 52051001.

HELP KICKSTART our new life in sun. Philanthropy towards deposit 20-98-21 20120014.

PLEASE HELP ME treat my partner to the present she deserves – aiming for Sydney and don't want to only make Skeggy. All donations received with sincere and heartfelt gratitude. Please help me prove that romance isn't dead: Barclays, Sort Code 20-41-12, Acct No 90626287.

A DECADE OF NO HOPE, suffering M.E. private treatment in London now offers possible chance of recovery from this debilitating disease. No money to pursue though. Please help. Acc# 19190960. sort code 30 87 84.

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HIGH VET BILLS – charity animal clinic needs funds. RBS 16-20-38 10022270.

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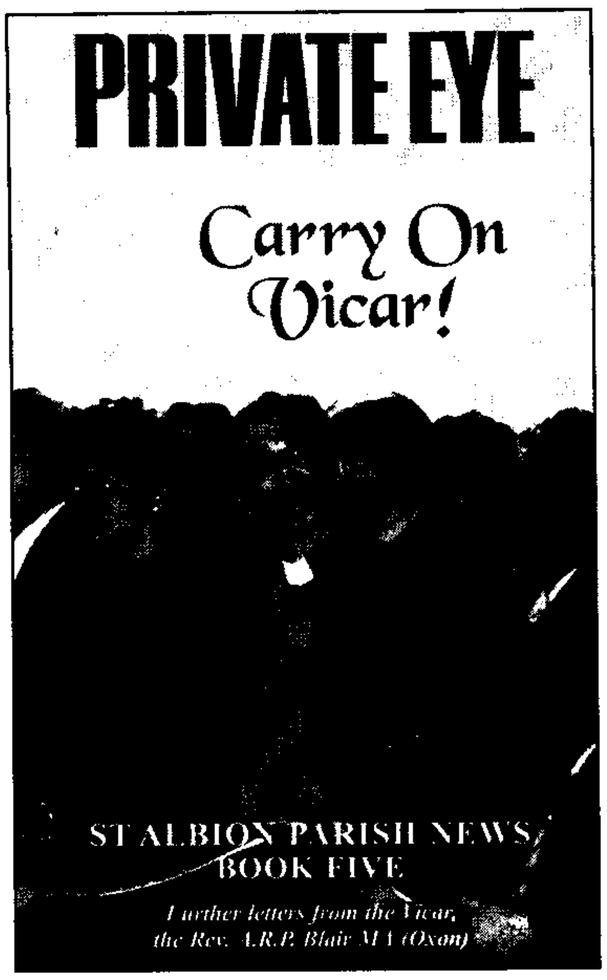

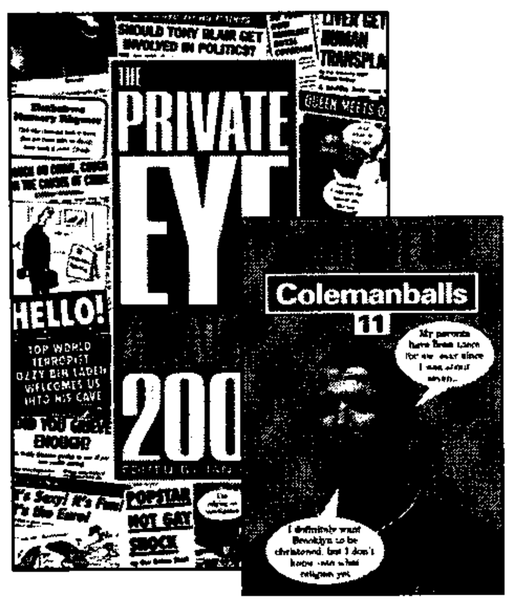

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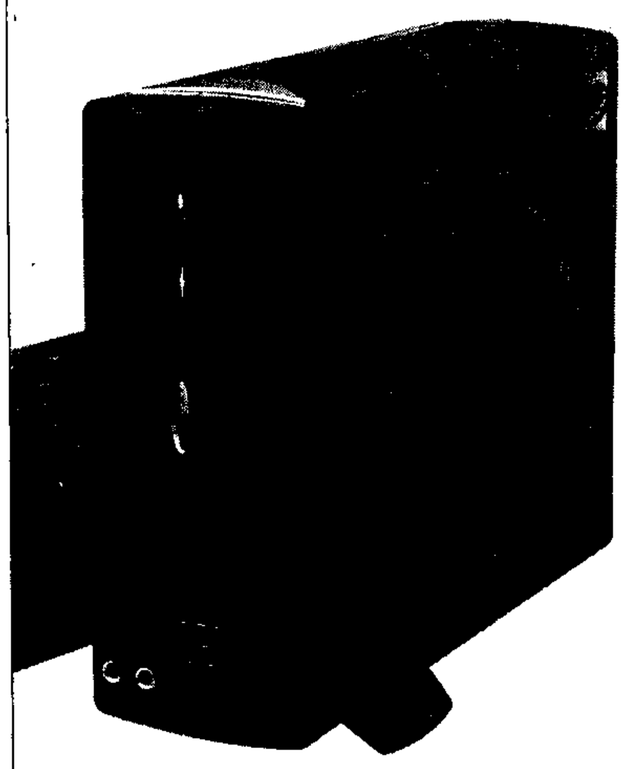

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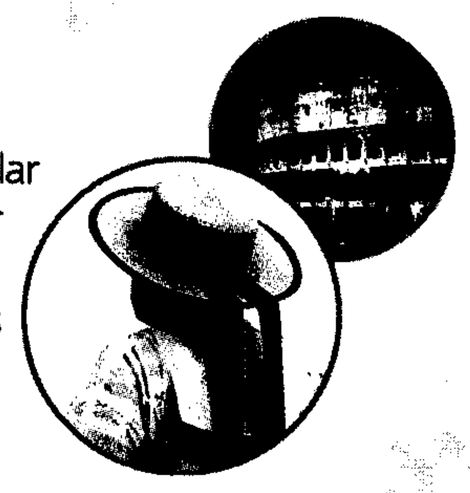

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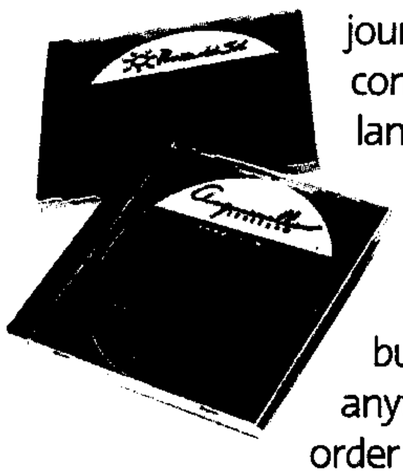

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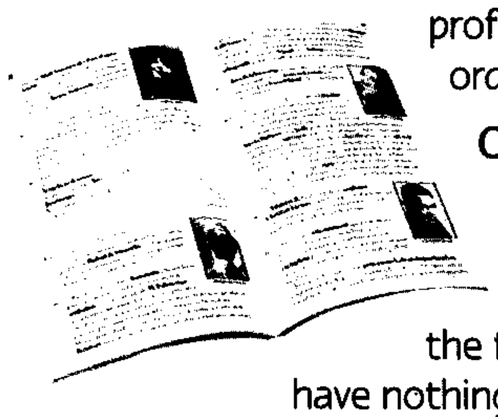

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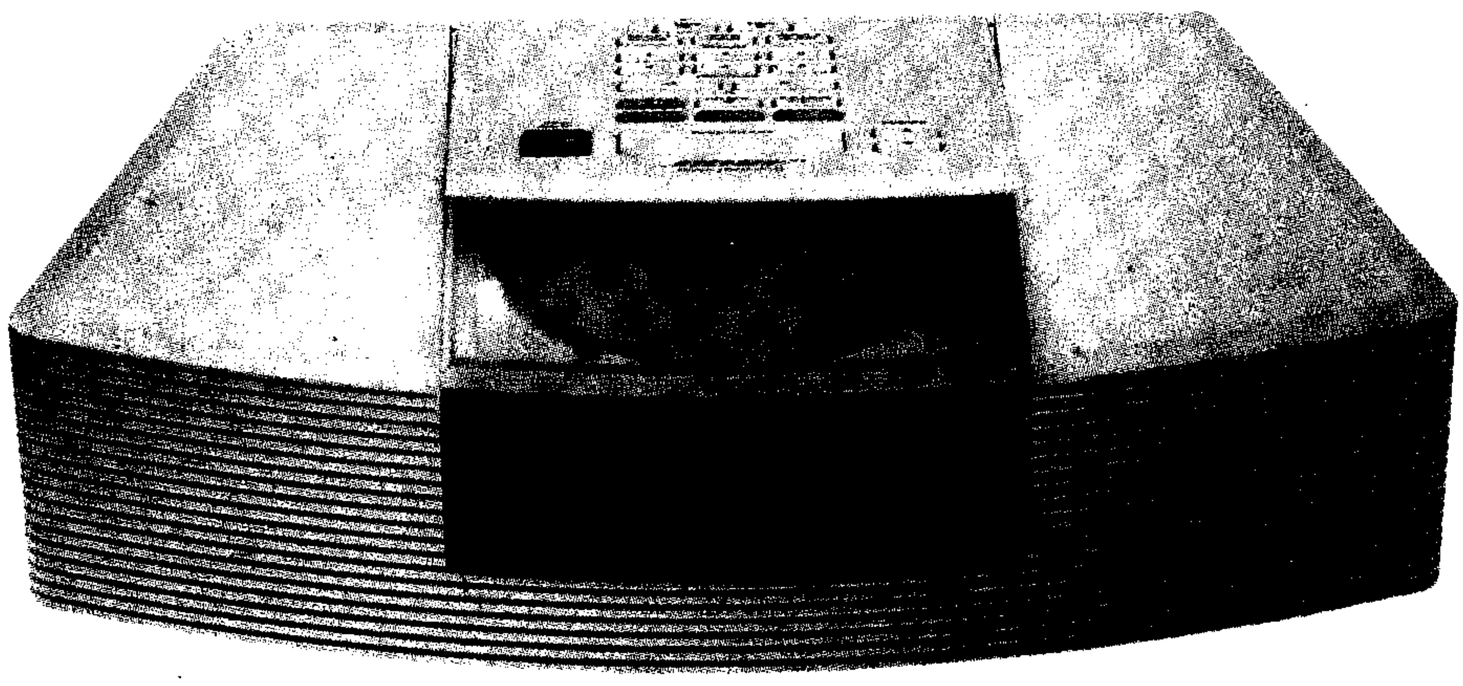

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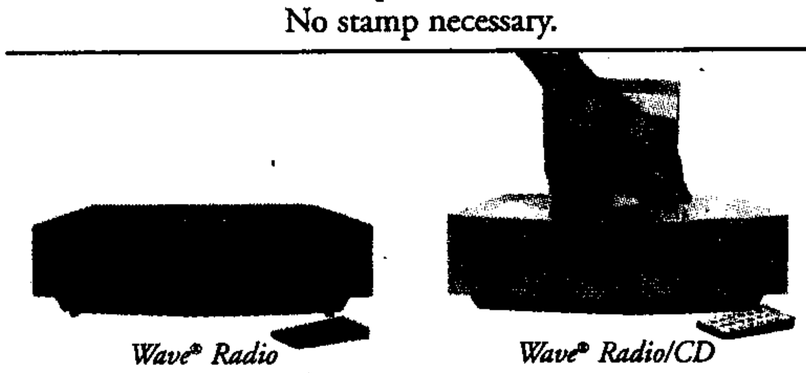

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